The Washington Monthly

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Jerry Brown on cash, campaigns, and corruption

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Mudwrestling in the Bush White House

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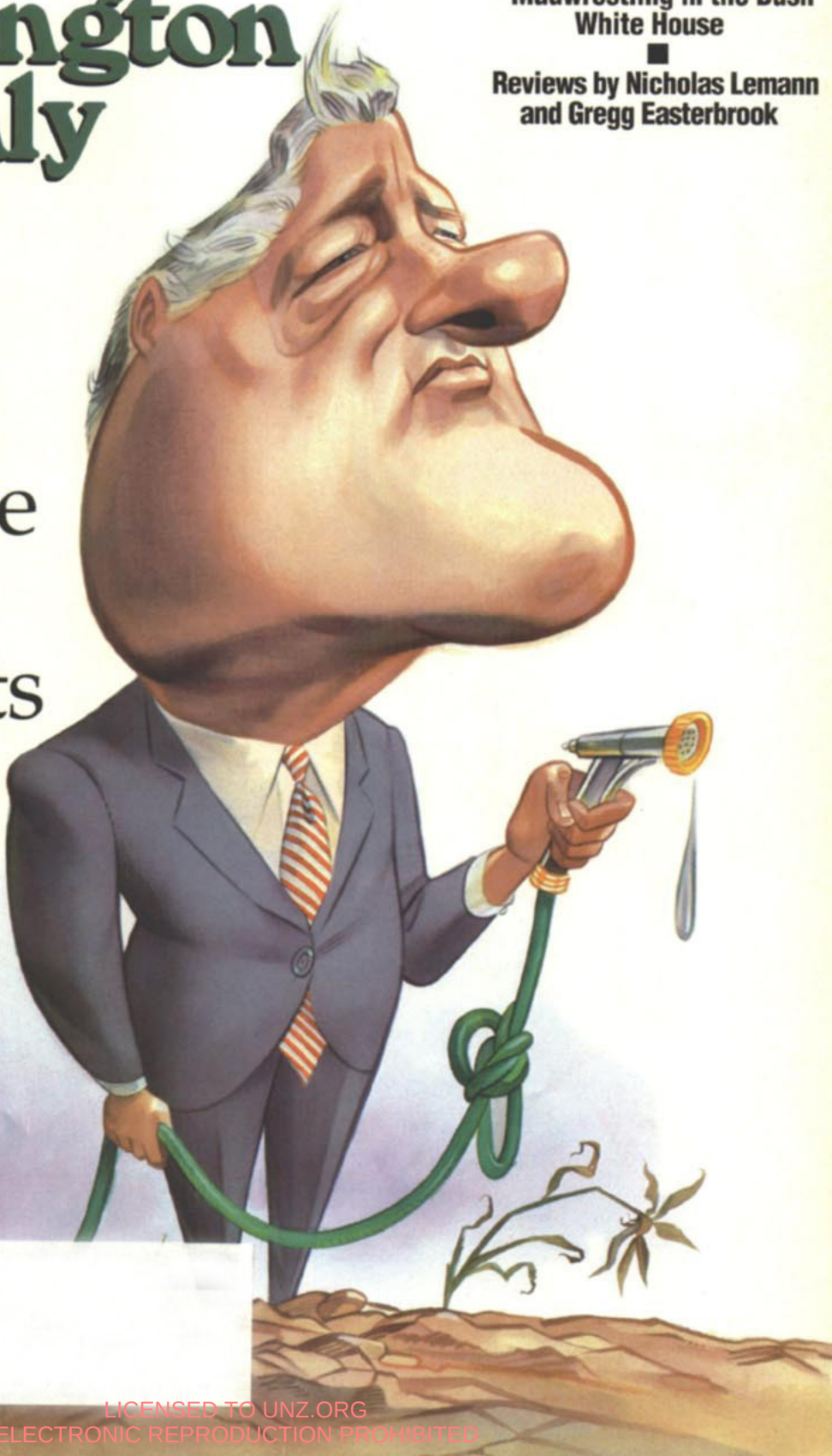
Reviews by Nicholas Lemann and Gregg Easterbrook

Why the Party of the People Has a Grassroots Problem

By Jon Meacham



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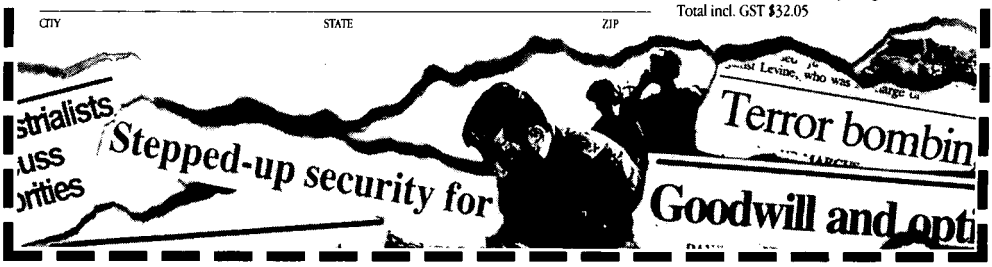

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The Washington Monthly

Volume Twenty-Five, Number Ten October 1993

Tilting at Windmills
by Charles Peters
The rich's new tennis racket . . . cardiologists on the Lido deck . . . Clinton's favorite jazz man . . . and other odds and ends. . . . 4

P. C. Corps
by Leslie Kaufman
Clinton's national service prototype was largely a poverty program disguised as a sensitivity seminar. 9

Renter Beware
by Mike Hudson
The $300 TV that ends up costing $1,200, and other ripoffs of the rent-to-own industry. 12

The Money Fix
by Edmund G. Brown Jr.
The Democrats' plan to clean up campaigns won't make politicians kick the Big Dollar habit. I know; I was addicted once myself. 17

Why the Party of the People Has a Grassroots Problem
by Jon Meacham
. . . and how to solve it. 22

Beyond Paper Cuts
by Charles Peters
Eight smart ways to cut the budget—and make smart investments. 30

Beaten and Bushed
by John Podhoretz
The black comedy of a White House on the verge of a nervous breakdown. 36

ON POLITICAL BOOKS:

The Wins of War
by Nicholas Lemann
Could something shy of war bring Americans together and turn the economy around? 46

With Enemies Like These
by Gregg Easterbrook
Pentagon reformers were the scourge of the military in the eighties, but guess whose weapons and tactics we used in Iraq? 50

Mistaken Identity
by Tom Bethell
A former staffer for Jim Garrison explains how Oliver Stone got the wrong villain—and the wrong hero—in the JFK assassination. 54

Political Booknotes
Review by **Charles William Maynes**. 58

LETTERS 2
WHO'S WHO 16
TIDBITS AND OUTRAGES 21
POLITICAL PUZZLE 29
MEMO OF THE MONTH 35
MONTHLY JOURNALISM AWARD 45

Cover illustration by **John Kascht**

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LETTERS

Smoke and mirrors

I'm always happy to see an exposé of tobacco companies' skullduggery, but I was very disappointed to see David Segal ["The Filtered Truth," September] start off with a misconception.

He states that "tar is what gives cigarettes flavor and causes disease; nicotine is what keeps smokers addicted." Actually, most of the excess deaths among smokers (60 percent in a typical study) are caused by heart disease, and this is caused by the nicotine, not the tar. Only about 13 percent of the excess deaths are due to lung cancer, which is caused by the tar, as are the other miscellaneous cancers (bladder, mouth, etc.) which account for the remaining excess deaths.

Why do most people think that lung cancer is the main manifestation of the lethality of cirarettes? Because in the absence of smoking , lung cancer is a rare disease, whereas heart disease is a leading cause of death among both voluntary and involuntary smokers.

MARSHALL E. DEUTSCH
Sudury, MA

Hatching a plot

Speaking as a federal employee (letter carrier) long muzzled by the Hatch Act, I must take exception with at least part of Jon Meacham's article ["Myth Information," July/August].

When Meacham airily proposes that "about half the work force" remain as "non-political employees," for me the obvious questions are: "Which half?" and "Why?"

Meacham bemoans the fact that federal employees will have "the right to campaign for a candidate who will be favorably disposed to pay raises, COLAs, generous pensions, and all the rest." Excuse me, but isn't it true that, say, AARP members have that right already with respect to Social Security, Medicare and "all the rest"? What is the difference?

DANNY BURTON
Columbus, IN

Mock the writer

I would have laughed off your "Mock the Vote" [Christopher Georges, May] article as a silly, condescending hatchet job on MTV if not for the time I wasted with your writer and the fact that the piece was reprinted in the *San Francisco Chronicle*.

Georges is perturbed that President Clinton's first national interview was with MTV's Tabitha Soren and not the likes of NBC's Tom Brokaw. Given Brokaw's cozy relations with recent presidents and his obsequious "Day in the Life of the President" specials, do you think the voting public really lost out? Is it your assumption that—unlike MTV—news coverage on NBC (owned by General Electric) is somehow neutral and independent?

What bothers me about the article is not that I took the time to talk to your writer, rebutting many of his arguments, only to find myself left out of the article. Unfortunately, that's not uncommon when my comments contradict a journalist's predetermined notion of his or her finished article. (So much for "journalistic fairness.")

What irks me is the repeated references to the "fact" that media watchers don't pay attention to MTV. As Georges knows, I watch MTV and MTV news regularly. My discussion with him was informed by my regular viewing of the network. I guess that's why I had to be written out of existence.

JEFF COHEN
Executive Director
Fairness & Accuracy in Reporting
New York, NY

UnCOLA

Having read *The Washington Monthly* for years, I enjoy many of your exposés, either because they are real, or give the appearance of being real. I was decidedly not happy, however, with your characterization of pensions and COLAs in the July/August issue ["Tilting at Windwills"]. You are trying to turn the paying of higher numbers in dollars due to the passing of time and inflation into higher purchasing power. That is, someone who made $10,000 in 1950 at retirement and who now is making $40,000, let's say, in pension, is better off, is raking it in, is gypping everybody in sight. The reality is, of course, that on retirement, the pension was at a lower figure in dollars (let's say 75% of the exact pay at the time of retirement), $7,500 vs. $10,000. Now, over the past 43 years since retirement, the only thing happening to his pension and everyone else's is the COLA adjustment. So the end result is, while the number of dollars paid per year is "more," the reality of purchasing power is not. The concept of the pension was to keep one at the same level that they were at retirement (less the decrease at the start). At the same time, let's say there had been no COLAs for these 43 years. Then the pensioner who started out at $7,500—a nice pay in 1950—would still be living on $7,500 per year. And we can all appreciate that today as being next to poverty.

So, please expose graft, waste, etc., but let's not be intellectually dishonest. Or if you are going to be intellectually dishonest, be more sophisticated.

H.G. CLARK
Miami,FL

The editor replies: Please see "Beyond Paper Cuts," page 30.

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Youa culpa

Editor Charles Peters raises an intriguing question: why movement conservatives, in contrast to some liberals (mostly the neo-variety), never admit to being wrong ["Tilting at Windmills," July/August].

Potential meas culpae can be sorted into three categories.

A. The indefensible:

Instead of admitting they were wrong to oppose 1960s civil rights bills, conservatives simply pretend the issue never existed. This "amnesia" method is also favored by some liberals embarrassed by their "moral equivalence" flabbiness toward Soviet repression.

B. The debatable:

Neoliberal confessions of guilt tend to be heard most often in the fields still contested by the old left. For example, true leftists still think the only problem with welfare is low benefit levels; making unwed motherhood attractive is a vital guarantee of women's liberation. Against this obtuseness, neoliberals are willing to cite accurate prophecies from both conservatives and other neoliberals (e.g. Sen. Moynihan). Where there is no disagreement about an issue, however, there is no need to discuss it.

This category shows the clearest difference between liberals and conservatives. Conservatives usually avoid trying to convert each other. Religious and libertarian conservatives have managed to work together on budget issues, while agreeing to disagree on abortion. Conservatives fed up with the obtuseness on the budget deficit found it easier simply to defect to Ross Perot.

C. The muddled:

Some conservatives might be willing to admit the "liberals" are right about national health insurance, except that there is no identifiable "liberal" national health insurance proposal. A crucial ingredient to make any such proposal work, rationing expensive treatments of doubtful effectiveness, brings disputes that cut across the usual left/right ideological fault lines.

HUGO S. CUNNINGHAM
Somerville, MA

Meat heads

Ann O'Hanlon's article ["Where's the Beef Been?" June] is one of the most accurate writings I've seen during this period of instant experts on the arcane subject of meat slaughter and processing.

It should be noted that there are fewer in-plant inspectors now than in 1978; however, there are now 463 more people in desk jobs on the Washington, regional, and area levels. Many or most of these jobs do nothing to enhance consumer protection: Inspectors do.

Because of the shortage, inspectors are assigned a number of processing plants to inspect everyday. Once a plant is visited by an inspector, the plant operator can be fairly sure that the inspector won't be back that day or at least for some hours. If the plant management is so inclined, any illegal activity can go on during this time.

DAVID KROEGER
Fremont, NE

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Clarification

Andrea Mitchell has asked us to explain that our article about travel abuses by the White House press corps ["More Champagne, Ms. Mitchell?" July/August] should not be taken to imply that she drinks on the job. She assures us she does not.

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TILTING AT WINDMILLS

There is at least one favorable comment going around about Bill Clinton to which I find myself nodding in agreement. It is that, even if you don't like every detail of his proposals or feel the administration hasn't done all it should to make its case to the public, Clinton has at least managed to put the important domestic issues on the country's agenda, from national service to national health care. In marked contrast to his recent predecessors, he has people thinking about what counts. And as incredible as it may seem for a liberal Democrat, Clinton may end up doing more to control the deficit and eliminate bureaucratic fat than either Reagan or Bush. . . .

What I believe will prove to be an immortal contribution to the literature of bureaucracy comes from a letter to *The New York Times* in which the writer descibes an attempt to report a large pothole:

"I called the number listed in the directory for 'Pothole Complaints,' (212) 323-8557. Twenty rings—no answer. Then I called the Department of Transportation, (212) 566-2525. I was told to call (212) 964-2110. A taped message then advised me to call (212) 768-4653. I called that number, and a woman's taped voice responded with another message:

'If you are calling from a touchtone phone, please press 1,' which I did. The next part of the tape asked the location of the pothole. If on a major highway, press 1. If in Manhattan, press 2. If in the Borough of Queens, press 3. If in Brooklyn, Press 4. If in the Bronx, press 5.

Since my pothole is in the Bronx, I pressed 5. I waited and the New York Telephone tape came on with a voice message: 'You have reached a nonworking number. Please call information to get the correct number.'" . . .

I think maybe I have the idea that could get the economy moving again. To explain the background of this stroke of genius, I should tell you that my wife and I own two cars that long ago passed the time they should have been traded in for newer models. One is a 1985 Ford Escort, the other a 1982 Ford Fairmount.

Why haven't we traded them in? One reason is that during much of the time we've owned the vehicles, we haven't felt we could afford to better ourselves. But the other reason is one that I suspect applies to tens of millions of potential new car buyers. We can't take being trapped in one of those cubicles where car dealers compel you to haggle for hours as they subject you to one confidence game after another.

Unless you're willing to pay the inflated price that the dealer originally seeks, you are almost certain to have to endure tiresome and often unpleasant bargaining. Why not require every auto dealer to do what Saturn does: Offer one take-it-or-leave-it price so that all you have to do is go to the showroom, pick out the car you want, leave your old heap behind, and drive happily away. If this policy was universally adopted, I'm sure all dealers offering a good car at a fair price would get the same result Saturn has obtained: more orders than they can fill. And of course the inevitable result would be a booming economy. . . .

Under new rules proposed by the Federal Election Commission, candidates for federal office will not be able to use campaign funds to pay salaries for themselves or their spouses or to buy themselves a new car or pay off their household mortgage. These, it should be emphasized, are new rules. Are you aware that such practices had previously been perfectly legal? Indeed they will remain so for another year to allow time for public comment, presumably to give crooked politicians—who else would oppose the rules?—time to get organized. . . .

In a similar vein, the state of New York is proposing to prohibit matrimonial lawyers from engaging in sexual relations with their clients. The practice had also heretofore been perfectly legal. At least in this case the sleazeballs don't have much of a chance of derailing the reform. It becomes effective in November. . . .

Speaking of sleaze, remember how Sears got caught ripping off its auto repair customers and published all those ads promising to reform? Well, it appears that the

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fellows have found new rackets. Out in Arizona, Sears stores in three different cities were caught selling warranties to Mexican customers who did not understand that the warranties were, according to the *Phoenix Gazette*, "worthless because Sears could not cross the border to service appliances." . . .

In the past when I have appeared to regard participation in the municipal bond business as prima facie evidence of corruption, readers have protested that I was guilty of McCarthyism. Of course I was, but in partial justification I cite the chairman of the House Banking Committee, Henry Gonzalez, who has said "The municipal securities business is a cesspool of corruption."

What happens is that bond firms will bribe state or local officials in order to get a governmental unit's bond business and will often pay the public less than market value of the bonds because of the favored treatment the firms are given by the officials. Even industry groups are awakening to the need to clean up their act. Last month, the Municipal Securities Rulemaking Board proposed rules that would prohibit bond dealers from making political contributions to get the business of the state and local government agencies that issue bonds.

But again you should watch that word "proposed." The forces with a stake in continuing corruption are many and powerful. Since most legal and underwriting firms are equally competent to do the bond work, the amount of the bribe is the only way they can distinguish themselves from one another. . . .

Other candidates for our honor roll of sleazeballs are the 17 citizens of New Jersey who after seeing a bus involved in an accident quickly climbed aboard and claimed to have been injured in the accident. . . .

The recent resignations from the State Department over Bosnia were a heartening sign that courage is on the rise in the Foreign Service. I can't recall any resignations in protest from the State Department during Vietnam. The irony is that today's protest is in favor of intervention while protest during the Vietnam era was against intervention. But back then, although most of the Foreign Service privately opposed the war, would tell you so off-the-record, and would even quietly encourage their spouses and sons and daughters to demonstrate against the war, at the office the Foreign Service was silent—or to be more precise, cowardly. One excuse you could give yourself—I know because it's the excuse I used until I quit in 1968—was that since your own work had nothing to do with Vietnam you should carry on. This was a pretty good excuse. The trouble was that if everyone used it, no one was telling the president that his policies were so offensive to his subordinates that they could no longer justify being part of his administration. A few White House employees quit in 1970 but that was five years after the disastrous escalation in 1965 that took us into a bloody ground war. . . .

Speaking of Vietnam, a recent issue of *Newsweek* declares that there is no solid evidence that John Kennedy planned to pull out of Vietnam. In fact, there is testimony from two very persuasive witnesses that JFK did plan to get out of Vietnam after the 1964 election. One is Ken O'Donnell, who Kennedy insiders knew was the aide closest to JFK. The other is then-Senator Mike Mansfield, a man with no interest in protecting the Kennedy administration and a man whose own reputation for honesty is very high. The same issue of *Newsweek* also declared that "the Mob helped Kennedy get elected in West Virginia." I challenge the editors of *Newsweek* to come up with "solid evidence" to back up this assertion. Come on fellows, show us what you've got. . . .

Where do you suppose the Sixth Annual Cardiovascular Symposium, co-sponsored by the University of Florida and the

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Cardiovascular Institute of Sarasota, is being held this year? Sarasota? Perhaps Tampa or Tallahassee? Of course not. It is to be held in Athens, Greece, and Istanbul, Turkey, "with a Six Day Cruise of the Greek Islands."

The advertisement for the symposium states that "20 hours of continuing education has been approved by the University of Florida." I was once on a cruise ship offering a similar symposium to doctors. It was held on "D" Deck and to say attendance was sparse would be charitable. Most of the physicians were stretched out on the sun deck.

Another favorite of mine was "Marine Medicine 1993," conducted this summer by the Medical School of the University of California, San Diego. Designed for physicians "who love the marine environment," this one offered 16 hours of continuing medical education credit, tax deductibility, and such educational pursuits as "Sea Kayaking in the surf at La Jolla Shores" and "Tijuana Olé, Tour and Shopping." The doctors who take tax deductions for these events—which of course sticks the rest of us with a substantial portion of the cost—are the same people you hear loudly complaining at the country club about the burden of all those welfare cheats. . . .

Washington's elite have so many rackets that it's hard to keep track of them. I became aware of one driving around town this summer. It is the tax-free tennis club. These clubs are located on the untaxed premises of such superelite institutions as Sidwell Friends, Landon, and St. Albans schools. So even the play of the well-connected is subsidized by the rest of us. . . .

The Associated Press recently did a story showing how a loophole in the campaign finance law is used to evade the limit of $2,000 that a candidate for federal office may receive from an individual:

"At a private fundraiser at Philadelphia's swanky Pyramid Club in May, well-heeled benefactors first met the limit for Harris Wofford's political war chest. Then the same contributors kicked in thousands more for the Democratic Senatorial Campaign Committee, which can underwrite ads, polling, and research for Mr. Wofford's 1994 reelection campaign. In all, individual donors who contributed the $2000 limit for Mr. Wofford's committee also gave the DSCC at least $269,000 at the May fundraiser." (For more on incumbent abuses, and how to prevent them, see Jerry Brown's article in this issue.). . .

The main weakness of Al Gore's National Performance Review is suggested by these words from the report's introduction:

"The problem is not the bureaucrat, it is the bureaucracy. It is not the lazy or incompetent people, it is the red tape and regulation."

The truth is that the bureaucrats *are* part of the problem. It was, for example, inept bureaucrats from the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco and Firearms who made the stupid decisions at Waco. Their counterparts exist throughout the government. Not just a handful but somewhere around a third of federal employees are of marginal or worse quality, and we're not going to have an effective government until we get rid of a substantial number of them. For

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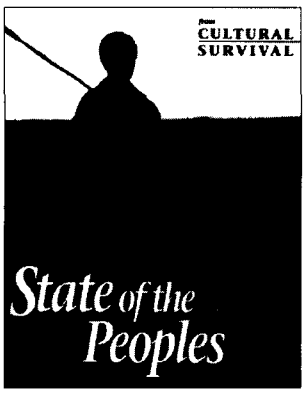

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example, chapter three of the Gore report recognizes a need for "pruning layer upon layer of managerial deadwood." How is this going to be done unless the deadwood can be dismissed? Gore says unnecessary jobs will be eliminated but that still leaves us with the incompetents who happen to be in real jobs . . . .

According to a poll conducted by *California Lawyer* magazine last year, 70 percent of the attorneys surveyed said they would change careers if they could. Why don't they consider teaching? A recent survey of teachers who had completed two years of teaching shows that 70 percent found working with students "very satisfying," and only 20 percent contemplated quitting. . . .

Of course lawyers make more money than teachers. First year associates in the big firms are still getting around $80,000. But—and this is a fact that should be pondered by those considering legal careers—the number of such job openings posted at Harvard has dropped by more than half in the last four years, according to *American Lawyer*. Furthermore, teachers' salaries have been improving, and quite a few states have eliminated the stupid education credit requirements that kept bright people like law graduates out of teaching. . . .

While Eugene Rossides was an assistant secretary at Treasury in the early 1970s, he instituted one of the few effective measures against the big drug dealer. It was using the technique that got Al Capone back in the thirties: catching them on income tax evasion. Probably because the program was working, after Rossides left the Nixon administration the program was reduced and later eliminated. Why not try it again?. . .

There are some other simple common sense steps against crime that I hope liberals and conservatives will be able to agree on. For instance, Mona Charen recently quoted Charles Colson as saying that half of the people we incarcerate are nondangerous criminals—check-kiters, swindlers, petty thieves. "There is no reason," Colson says "that they could not be punished by other means (work programs, home incarceration with electronic bracelets) and required to pay restitution to their victims. That would free up prison space for the truly dangerous."

Janet Reno seems to be thinking along similar lines so there might be a realistic basis for my hope that liberals and conservatives can get together.

Another point I think anyone who has dealt with crime will realize is true was made in a recently published interview with Wilbert Rideau, the prison inmate and author who was asked "What will stop violent crime?" His answer:

"Only one thing: the certainty of apprehension. If a criminal fears that he's going to get caught, he will think twice before he robs or steals. And it won't matter whether the sentence is one or 100 years."

I would add, however, that the sentence does matter in terms of keeping the violent from doing more harm. For example, a Maryland man who was arrested last month for a sexual attack had just been released six years before the expiration of his sentence for raping an 11-year-old-girl. Before that crime, this man had been convicted for two other sexual assaults. There is no way he should have been let out early. The reason for letting the nonviolent out of prison is so that we can keep guys like this in. . . .

I want to thank *The Washington Times* for its recent nostalgic article about the soda fountains that used to be part of almost every American drug store. There was one called Schwartz's across the street from our office until a decade or so ago. Like so many other soda fountains around the country, it was a community center, a place where people could informally gather to shoot the breeze and even, especially in the case of teenagers, find romance. The soda fountain played the same role as bars and pubs without the unhappy side effect of encouraging alcoholism. . . .

I've found another article about the Canadian and German health care systems that gives the impression of disaster until one gets well into the story. As we've pointed out in the past with regard to many similar articles, it's only after many paragraphs that the reader learns that whatever is wrong, the system is considerably better than ours. This latest example from the *Los Angeles Times* says on the front page that

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—Erwin Knoll, Editor, *The Progressive*

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the German system is "beset by problems, including a bureaucratic logjam."

But the diligent reader who turns the page will learn that the German system costs only 8 percent of GNP compared to America's 12 percent and that costs are rising at a much slower rate than in America. Also the German system "offers patients the freedom to choose their doctor and the doctors the freedom to work privately, free of any large centralized control." Further, "The German system works without the horror stories of collapsing services and yearlong waits for routine surgery associated with some other state run programs.". . .

This doesn't mean there aren't problems in the German system. The most conspicuous is too much paperwork for physicians. But that problem is even worse in the American system of multiple insurers, where each company has different forms and different questions for doctors to answer. The Canadian system eliminates this burden, which is one of the reasons why we favor it. Another reason for the Canadian system is that, unlike the German and American systems or the Clinton proposal, most of its financing does not come from employment taxes. Such taxes are a major disincentive to employment, especially in businesses that are struggling to break even. These taxes also discourage employers from offering good part time jobs. Such jobs make great human sense, especially for parents of young children who need to work but want to be home during part of the day. But employers who dislike paying health insurance for regular employees are naturally even less enthusiastic about footing the bill for part-timers. National health insurance paid for by other kinds of taxes would save more jobs—both part- and full-time—and make many people's lives much saner. . . .

The Clintons want to keep the burden on the employer and the employee because they think they can get away with calling that tax a "premium." As Hillary Clinton recently told *The New York Times*, "It's a premium, not a payroll tax." Whatever she calls it, it's still going to be paid by the employer and the employee whether the business is making money or not, and that means the tax is bound to discourage employment. Obviously, businesses that are barely breaking even will have to fire some employees in order to pay "premiums" for others. If the Clintons would just call the premium what it is—a tax—then we might see it as one of a number of possible taxes we could choose, including much preferable ones such as higher income taxes on the rich or a tax on profits that wouldn't threaten struggling businesses. Or maybe we could take a page from Hillary's book and call all taxes premiums. It does sound nicer, doesn't it? . . .

I am delighted to read that Bill Clinton is a fan of the great saxophonist, Illinois Jacquet, and has even memorized how to play Jacquet's part in the famous Lionel Hampton version of "Flying Home." I was a devoted fan of Jacquet's when he was with the Hampton band in the late forties. It often performed in New York, where I was a college student at the time. Sometimes Jacquet would also perform at jazz concerts around the city. At one memorable midnight session at Carnegie Hall that I attended with Allen Ginsberg (who explained to me that the aroma I smelled was marijuana smoke), Jacquet and Flip Phillips from the old Woody Herman band played the greatest saxophone duet I've ever heard. If the president would like to track it down, I believe they called it "Blues Part 2.". . .

—*Charles Peters*

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P.C. Corps

Clinton's national service prototype was largely a poverty program disguised as a sensitivity seminar

by Leslie Kaufman

Standing before a hand-painted banner of a huge glowing sun and sliding easily into the talk-show format that has become his trademark, President Clinton was in his element as he addressed the hundreds of college-age students who had just completed the "Summer of Service," his first national service initiative. Mutual congratulations and youthful optimism filled the air. "We could revolutionize our country. There are no problems we cannot solve, there is no future we cannot have," he told them to wild cheers.

National service for youth is at the heart of Clinton's vision of a revitalized America and a new Democratic Party, and it is on the verge of becoming a reality. In August, Congress obliged the President by enacting the National Service Act of 1993, which will provide scholarships to students who perform community service. The effusive bipartisan rhetoric that surrounded the legislation's passage conjured up images of a youthful army marching into poor communities to vaccinate children and clean streets. But the reality of national service may turn out to be something quite different. If the Summer of Service is any indication, national service under Clinton will be short on civic responsibility and actual service, long on racial politics and therapeutic self-esteem training, and hard on the taxpayer's pocketbook.

The Summer of Service (SoS), a ten-week program that ran from mid-June to mid-August, gave 1,400 students from around the country $1,000 education vouchers in return for working eight-hour days at a subsistance wage on community projects. While substantially smaller than the National Service Act—which will give 100,000 participants school vouchers worth close to $10,000 in re-

Leslie Kaufman is an assistant editor at Government Executive Magazine.

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turn for two years of service (participants are also eligible for child care, health care, and salary supplements from private matching funds)—the SoS was billed by the Clinton administration as a prototype for the more ambitious endeavor.

That is a real cause for concern. The Commission on National and Community Service, which ran SoS and will become a corporation and administer the National Service Act, placed diversity high on its list of criteria for groups applying for SoS funds. Applicants were expected to recruit participants from "diverse racial, economic and educational backgrounds." The students ultimately chosen for SoS, however, were anything but a portrait of America. According to Jennifer Eblett Reilly, the national director of the Summer of Service, about 75 percent of the participants in SoS were minority—42 percent African-American, 15 percent Latino, 13 percent Asian, and 4 percent Native American. Further, although the Commission itself doesn't have figures on socio-economic background, interviews with numerous people involved with the program suggest that a sizeable majority of participants came from low-income families in our inner cities.

Most SoS staffers argue that high minority participation was necessary to win the trust of the largely minority communities that SoS participants were to serve. But ironically, and perhaps predictably, the Commission's zealous effort to breed harmony through inclusion had almost the opposite effect. Before SoS began, the participants were flown in from around the country to Treasure Island near San Francisco for one week of pre-service training. According to attendees, who asked not to be named, the gathering quickly balkanized. Ethnic groups formed separate cliques and then squared off against their hosts. One "facilitator" recalls the chill that went up her spine when she heard a voice call out over the loudspeaker, "All African-Americans please assemble now." Hispanic and gay, lesbian, and bisexual participants also held separate meetings to discuss how the SoS wasn't meeting their particular needs. The fiasco culminated at a forum on the final day, which was attended by Eli Segal, the director of the White House Office of National Service. The newly formed African-American caucus issued a list of demands, including that the leadership of the Commission have more minorities (Catherine Milton, who is executive director of the Commission, and Segal are white).

Even more worrisome than the Commission's notion of racial diversity is its determination to turn over as much of the program as possible to at-risk youth. Interviews with several of the program coordinators revealed a great disdain for "traditional" measures of leadership, like good grades or participation in school activities. Instead, community groups were told that in evaluating "non college-bound youth" they were to look for "leadership *potential*" and "diversity in accomplishment" (i.e. students who fall short of formal standards). Program coordinators brag about recruiting former gang members, drug dealers, and unwed teenage mothers. Seth Goldman, who directed 50 SoS members in tutoring projects this summer, proudly explains that his "best tutor was convicted of an adult felony for possession of a sawed-off shotgun."

Why boast about bringing along former felons? The answer lies in the persistent belief among SoS program directors that former criminals make the best role models because they "can relate to kids." Since over half the SoS programs involved tutoring and education, you'd think academic performance might figure as an appropriate standard to judge participants. However, like most of her colleagues, Debbie Stephens, the assistant director of BuildingUp L.A., one of the 16 partnerships, doesn't see it that way. She says that because her participants traffic in very basic levels of information it is easy enough for everyone to stay ahead of the younger children being taught.

All of which gives SoS the appearance of a jobs program with a special emphasis on therapy. Reilly peppers her description of the program with the Hillary-esque catchword of "meaningfulness" and admits that SoS had *two* fundamental goals: national service and provid-

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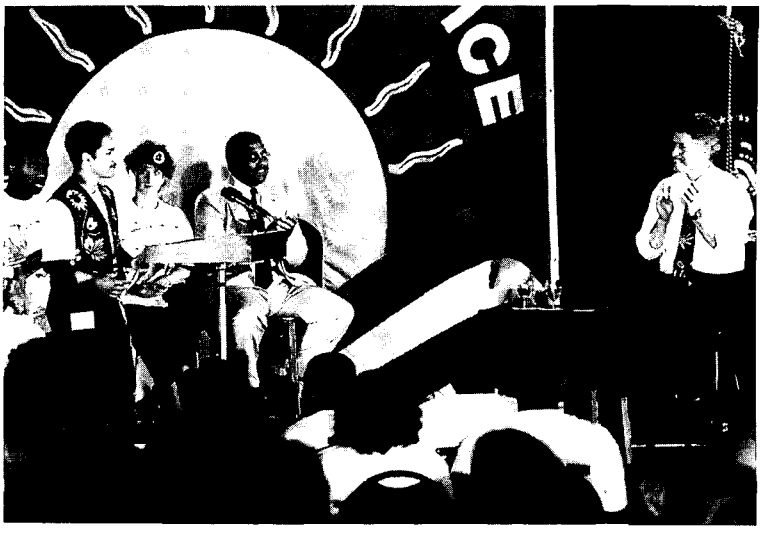
ing an "opportunity" for kids from bad neighborhoods to get jobs and to learn "self-esteem." She argues, however, that the two goals are not at odds with each other and should be complementary: What better way for kids to learn self-worth and self-discipline than from working on a project to help their community?

But most SoS programs were not content to let "self-esteem" grow from service alone. Many of the programs had their volunteers take daily breaks for gab sessions to share their experiences in the field and scheduled time for team-building exercises like group calisthenics. Emphasis was placed on what the SoS corps members were feeling. But in all the warm talk about growing and learning, one does not often hear words like "duty" "responsibility," or "obligation." There is little sense that this program met what one might call the JFK standard: A participant should consider what he's giving to the country before asking what benefit accrues to him.



The question of sacrifice might be moot if the SoS workers unambiguously met genuine community needs. Many projects funded by SoS, however, were less related to pressing social need than to educational and political priorities that few would associate with national service. One project provided training in political advocacy. The Harlem [N.Y.] Freedom Schools—privately-funded, open admissions summer schools—hired 50 people with SoS money and taught them how to lobby, mount letter-writing campaigns, and use the media. Other projects included mural painting, cultural awareness lectures, diversity sensitivity sessions, and putting on carnivals to entertain kids who might be prone to join gangs. Nichole Gonzaque, a team leader in South Central Los Angeles, and her colleagues brought self-esteem training to L.A.'s public elementary schools. "Some of these kids had never even heard of self-esteem," she says, aghast. And the Commission gave $30,000 dollars to the St. Louis Hollywood Youth Corps to pay its members while they made videos about their community.

The Commission not only accepted programs of checkered quality, it also allowed participants to wander from their assigned tasks and design their own service projects. For example, 10 SoS participants who were supposed to help refurbish a garden with the nonprofit Newark [New Jersey] Conservancy became disenchanted with the project once they discovered how much manual labor was involved. With permission from the umbrella group supervising their project, the SoSers decided they would rather teach environmentalism in the schools. They chose three topics—biodiversity, "land pollution," and global warming—and then "educated" themselves about them and designed presentations, all in the course of two weeks. Rondeep Kaur, the team leader, was unfazed by her group's basic lack of education in these relatively complex areas. Nor was she unsure about the impending environmental devastation that the children were helping to prevent. "We just taught them to respect plants and animals like we respect other people because we all share this planet together," she explains.

The Commission on National and Public Service might believe such ad hoc environmentalism worthwhile, but President Clinton invokes a different ideal when he asks all Americans to assume the responsibility of service. We can only hope that the National Service program itself will be truer to that rhetoric than its misdirected prototype. □

Wide World Photos

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Renter Beware

The $300 TV that ends up costing $1,200, and other rip-offs of the rent-to-own industry

by Mike Hudson

Just $14.99 a week for a color television sounds pretty good to a $6-an-hour factory worker or a mother on welfare. For people without the cash or the squeaky-clean credit history to buy it at Sears, "renting to own" offers an alluring alternative: easy payments, no credit check, and no hassles. But your mother should have told you this: When you hear phrases like "no credit check and no hassles," keep your hand on your wallet. Someone's trying to pick your pocket.

The rent-to-own equation is simple. When a rent-to-own store brings in a new piece of merchandise, it multiplies the wholesale price by a set percentage—usually 350 percent to 450 percent—to come up with the total sales price. Then the store divides that total by a number of weeks or months—typically 78 weeks or 18 months—to determine what the installment payments will be. Throw in fees for insurance, late charges, and other submerged costs, and eventually customers pay three, four, or five times what they'd spend on the same item at a retail store. That's why a 20-inch TV that costs $329.99 at Sears will cost as much as $1,200, at Rent-A-Center, the nation's largest chain of rent-to-own outlets.

With these exorbitant prices come a set of rules that grossly favor the retailer over the customer. Iris Green, a public housing resident in Paterson, N.J., paid nearly $4,000 to Continental Rentals toward a stereo, washer, freezer, and other items that had a cash value of less than $2,800. Then she got sick and the paychecks from her job as a nursing home aide stopped coming. Continental came and took everything. Sandra James signed a $2,485 rent-to-own contract for bedroom furniture from a Rent-A-Center in Chicago. She fell behind in her payments and the store swore out a theft charge against her. She says the manager told

Mike Hudson is a reporter with the Roanoke (Va.) Times & World-News. *He researched this story while on a reporting fellowship with the Alicia Patterson Foundation.*

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her the warrant would be dropped if she paid $177.50. She paid but then was hauled off her job by police officers accompanied by the manager. She spent the night in jail.

Rent-to-own got its start back in the sixties, when state and federal governments were passing laws to control ghetto merchants who used retail installment contracts to fleece the poor. The industry's trade group, the Association of Progressive Rental Organizations (APRO), says the rent-to-own industry was born during this time "as a result of the tightening of consumer credit and burgeoning federal consumer protection legislation."

Rent-to-own stores have managed to avoid tough consumer laws by tinkering with the traditional retail credit contract. Mainly, it's a matter of changing the terminology. An interest charge becomes a "rental fee." A late charge becomes a "reinstatement fee." Merchandise that is repossessed is "returned by the customer." Buying an item is "exercising a purchase option."

For customers, the only advantage to this system is that if they can't afford to keep paying, the item can be brought back to the store with no further obligation for the rest of the payments. That's a nice option for anyone whose income is unreliable. But it's not much of a consolation for somebody like Iris Green, who's already invested thousands of dollars in the merchandise. It's been enough in most states, however, to get rent-to-own exempted from retail-credit laws which generally limit store owners to interest rates of 20 to 30 percent a year. By avoiding such regulation, rent-to-own dealers can charge the equivalent of interest rates of 100, 200, even 300 percent a year.

In the past three decades, rent-to-own has grown from a handful of inner-city operators one step ahead of the law to a powerful nationwide industry with 7,500 stores and revenues over $3.5 billion annually. It's dominated by a few conglomerate-owned, upscale-looking chains that have changed the look, if not the reality, of selling to the poor.

In spite of the industry's new image, it continues to spend a lot of money defending itself against lawsuits from attorneys for the poor. (At a legal issues seminar for rent-to-own dealers last year, the first question from the audience was: "What can we do to abolish Legal Aid?") The litigation has occasionally taught the industry something about the consequences of heavy-handed collection tactics. But the lawsuits have had less success in changing the pricing equation that makes every customer a victim. The industry has beaten back almost all challenges with a two-pronged strategy. First, overwhelm understaffed Legal Aid offices with private bar talent (or buy off destitute customers with modest confidential settlements). Then, work to change the laws.

In most states, industry lobbyists have prevailed by combining free-market rhetoric and hard-ball politicking. Back in 1983, Jeanne Fenner, a North Carolina state legislator, introduced a bill that would have limited finance charges on rent-to-own contracts. Pro-business lawmakers gutted the bill and then the industry took revenge on Fenner. During her next two campaigns, rent-to-own dealers from as far away as Texas poured more than $20,000 into her opponents' campaigns. Fenner, who spent a fraction of that, lost both times. Since then, rent-to-own opponents in North Carolina have gotten nowhere.

In many other states, the industry has headed off such nasty fights by using an effective strategy of preemptive regulation. It works like this: Dealers approach a legislator with a reputation as a consumer advocate and say, "We want to be regulated so we can protect our customers from the handful of bad apples out there. We've written a law that will do the trick."

The industry's model statute sounds good. And no doubt it does help run off some of the most outrageous scam artists because it includes some protections for consumers, like requiring that stores be honest about their prices and state whether an item is new or used. But the law also exempts rent-to-own deals from state retail credit laws and the interest limits that go along with them. "Disclose and Anything Goes," Legal Aid attorneys call this strategy. Since 1984, at least 35 states have passed such rent-to-own friendly statutes.

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The industry—which by the late 1980s was spending half a million dollars a year on legislative efforts—has even persuaded the Council of State Governments to endorse its model bill. And it seemed ready to palm off the same statute on Congress until Texas Rep. Henry Gonzalez was joined on his House Banking, Finance, and Urban Affairs committee by a number of newly-elected urban liberals.

What explains this history of legislative successes? Good public relations is much of it. The industry has convinced more than a few powerful people of what might generously be called half-truths:

➤ *We're just a bunch of family-owned stores. Too much regulation would put us out of business.*

In written testimony submitted to Gonzalez's committee this spring, the executive director of the industry's trade association declared that "Eighty percent of the industry is made up of 'mom and pop' operators with fewer than five stores each." Later, during his oral testimony, he changed that figure to "over two-thirds."

Even that's wrong. Rent-A-Center, the Wichita-based chain owned by Thorn EMI, a global conglomerate whose other assets include country-music star Garth Brooks, controls 1,200 of the industry's 7,500 or so stores. That's nearly 20 percent of the market all by itself. In fact, in written answers to questions from the House committee, the trade association's own figures indicate that 40 percent of rent-to-own stores are owned or franchised by chains with 25 or more outlets. David Ramp, a Minneapolis Legal Aid attorney who has been fighting the industry for years, says his research shows that 60 percent of the market is controlled by fewer than 20 large corporations. And the industry trend is toward more and more consolidation.

➤ *We don't prey on the poor. Our customers come from all walks of life.*

Actually, rent-to-own prices are enough to make you want to keep your eight track.

Anecdotal evidence aside, it's clear that the vast bulk of rent-to-own's customer base comes from the poor or near-poor. For example, Rent-A-Center's own market research has shown that nearly 60 percent of its customers earn less than $20,000 a year, while just 4 percent earn $45,000 or more. Only about 7 percent are college graduates.

● *We're in the rental business, not retail. Just 25 percent of our customers end up owning. Most bring back their merchandise after a few weeks.*

This is the industry's big lie. "We're in the retail merchandising business when you get right down to it," Larry Sutton, an owner in a Florida rent-to-own chain, told fellow dealers at a 1991 seminar. "We don't want to say that in court. [But] let's face it: We're in the retail business. We sell." Indeed, in a national survey, 70 percent of Rent-A-Center customers said they intended to own the merchandise. Just 11 percent said they only wanted a short-term lease. In fact, 48 percent believed they already owned the goods even before the "lease" was completed.

To test what they do tell consumers, I visited 15 rent-to-own stores in Georgia, New Jersey, Pennsylvania, and Virginia. I asked questions just like any customer off the street. Among them: What percentage of customers end up owning? Not one of them gave the 25 percent figure that's

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cited in official settings. Seven estimated 80 percent or more. Six others gave estimates ranging from 45 percent to 70 percent. At another store, a salesman said simply: "Almost all of them."

➤*We charge more because of the high costs of theft and because we offer free repairs.*

In congressional testimony this spring, the industry's trade group said that 12 percent of rent-to-own merchandise is stolen. However, the industry association's chief attorney wrote in an 1989 trade journal article that rent-to-own stores' losses from stolen merchandise consistently averages about 2 percent of revenues—considerably less than what credit-card companies are forced to write off in unpaid debts.

As for free repairs and replacement, a lot of the stuff—such as furniture—requires little maintenance, and much of it is covered by manufacturer's warranties. A Rent-A-Center study found that less than five percent of their merchandise needed repairs.

But the spectre of damaged goods is actually a cash cow for the industry. Most stores require customers to pay "damage and theft waiver fees"—essentially credit insurance that covers the store if something happens to the merchandise. In return for the fee, you won't owe anything to the store if the merchandise is damaged or stolen during the contract period. The downside, of course, is that you're also out all the payments you've already made and can't keep what you've been paying for.

Typically, a rent-to-own store will charge you $1 a week in "waiver" fees for insurance—so that a $330 TV from Rent-A-Center (for which you're paying $1,200) costs another $74 to insure. For roughly that sum you could buy enough renter's insurance to cover $10,000 or even $20,000 worth of personal belongings. Rent-A-Center, meanwhile, makes a bundle on the extra fee: Ramp's research has shown that Rent-A-Center has to write off only about a nickel in claims for each dollar it takes in "waiver fees." (Another big money maker is fees to forgive late payments. Rent-A-Center customers in Minnesota paid $1.3 million in "reinstatement" charges over one four-year period).

Even where lawmakers haven't been snookered into buying this industry propaganda, rent-to-own dealers have found ways to get around the law. When Pennsylvania passed a statute in 1989 that defined rent-to-own as a retail sale and sets an annual interest limit of 18 percent, the state's rent-to-own dealers claimed the law would put them out of business. It didn't. Instead, most ignored it or found ways to skirt it. Some, for example, now offer straight rentals ("rent-to-rent") with the promise of a "rebate" that the customer can use to purchase the item at the end of the contract. An undercover investigation by the Pennsylvania attorney general's office found rent-to-own stores were still charging annual interest rates from 82 to 265 percent.

This end run shows the problem with trying to regulate away price-gouging: As long as there's a consumer demand and a market that is locked out of mainstream credit, some businesses will find a way to take advantage. "If you want nice things—where are you gonna go if you can't get credit?" asks Tonya Cross, a rent-to-own customer in Roanoke, Va. "If you want it, you're gonna have to get it from somewhere."

Which is where consumer advocates come in. Many customers are illiterate or financially unsophisticated and have little idea that they are paying double or triple retail, or more. Few know that—as the industry has sworn in court and in Congress—you have only a one-in-four chance of ultimately keeping the stuff when you rent-to-own. A consumer protection campaign pushing these themes would be a good start.

Other customers, like Cross, know that they're paying more, but go the rent-to-own route because they believe they have no other choices. That's why government and consumer activists should provide them with some alternatives by putting more resources into credit unions and other non-profit institutions that offer savings accounts and small loans to poor and working people.

In the meantime, there are some cheaper (though not inexpensive) alternatives: Buying things on time from retail stores or with credit cards is almost always cheaper than renting to own. Paying 20 percent interest a year or more to a retail store isn't cheap, but it's less than rent-to-own and the chances you'll actually keep the goods are better. Taking the plunge with Sears simply has to be better than paying $1,200 for a $300 TV. □

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WHO'S WHO

In White House circles, **Bill Clinton** is renowned for communicating with his staff by writing illegibly on clips that he rips out of newspapers. His executive assistant, **Nancy Hernreich**, is often called upon to translate the president's scrawlings. . . .

Women who are viewers of **Ted Turner's** TNT, TBS, and CNN maybe interested to know that the Turner Broadcasting System has contributed to Senator **Bob Packwood's** defense fund. (**Jane**, where were you?) Viewers can easily protest by switching to other channels. The female customers of **Southwest Airlines** and of **Atlantic Richfield**, whose CEOs also contributed to the Packwood fund, may want to patronize other companies. . . .

Carolyn Cruce was **Vince Foster's** personal secretary when he was practicing in Little Rock 15 years ago. For a year she also worked for **Hillary Rodham**, who at the time wasn't using the Clinton part of her name. Here are Ms. Cruce's comments made to the *Tallahassee Democrat* (she now lives in Florida):

"I'm loathe to speak about her because I can't say much nice about her. . . .When Miss Rodham came she gave me all this personal work."

The *Democrat* goes on to recount one day when Foster asked Cruce why his work wasn't getting out promptly. She explained the situation to Foster, who then marched into Rodham's office and told her that personal work wasn't Cruce's responsibility. Moments later, according to Cruce, Rodham came out of her office and chewed her out for complaining to Foster. . . .

Last month we mentioned that **Foster** continued to do personal work for **Bill and Hillary Clinton** after he went on the White House payroll, apparently forgetting the distinction he had made in **Cruce's** case. We have since learned that **Bernard Nussbaum**, Foster's boss, was doing the same thing, working on setting up a blind trust for the Clintons' personal funds. Nussbaum, by the way, is said to have become a victim of the Washington Social Disease. Reports **Eleanor Clift**: "He starts most morning meetings by regaling staffers with the latest dinner party or embassy reception he attended.". . .

Anthony Lake may rank as the lowest profile head of the National Security Council in history. One critic says there is no coherent strategy direction coming from the NSC, another that it doesn't have much clout. But Lake's defenders say he is trying to avoid the kind of open warfare between State and NSC that existed when Lake worked under **Cy Vance** at State and **Zbigniew Brzezinski** at the NSC was constantly undermining Vance. . . .

This wouldn't be a surprise under the Republicans, but did you know that according to *The Washington Post* there are at least three millionaires on **Bill Clinton's** White House staff? **Thomas McLarty**, the chief of staff, and **Robert Rubin** and **Howard Paster**, respectively the chief economic and legislative aides, are in that elite class. **Bernard Nussbaum**, who was a Wall Street lawyer, may be another. And what about **Ira Magaziner**, whose wealth was noted in a recent article in these pages? . . .

And did you know that there are more than 300 House staff members making more than $100,000 per year? At least 20 are earning the top figure of $119,000. And guess, among the House leadership, who has the most high-priced staffers on the public payroll? Not Speaker **Tom Foley** or Majority Leader **Dick Gephardt** but the presumably parsimonious Republican Leader **Bob Michel**, who pays his chief of staff, three floor assistants, and an associate director anywhere from $104,878 to $119,120. . . .

Our recent article about the White House press corps pointed out that because of favorable customs treatment, correspondents are able to smuggle in goods from overseas trips. Here are some facts that bear on that issue. According to *The Washington Post*, 3,190 journalists and crew members have flown on the White House press planes on 21 overseas trips since 1988. The review found that 43 customs declarations were filed. Does anyone really think that only 43 out of 3,190 ordinary travelers have something to declare? . . .

Do you sometimes get the feeling that our conflict-of-interest laws may be a tad too loose? Take **William H. Heyman,** who was the SEC's leading investigator of Salomon Brothers until last month when he was hired by Salomon Brothers and switched sides. Should **Al Capone** be able to hire **Eliot Ness**? . . .

Steven K. Berry, you may recall, was the State Department official who was demoted after a report by the department's Inspector General, **Sherman M. Funk**, accused him of "totally inappropriate" conduct in the Clinton passport affair. Berry then joined the staff of Senator **Jesse Helms**. Helms is now sponsoring an amendment limiting State's Inspector General to a term ending December 31, 1993. . . .

Bill Clinton may have trouble in the opinion polls when voters are asked what they think about him, but when the question concerns how they would vote if Clinton was opposed by **Perot**, **Dole**, **Kemp**, or **Quayle**, Clinton wins in every case. . . .

—*Susan Threadgill*

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The Money Fix

The Democrats' plan to clean up campaigns won't make politicians kick the Big Dollar habit. I know; I was addicted once myself

by Edmund G. Brown Jr.

Last May, President Clinton unveiled his plan to change corrupt campaign practices. The president calls his proposal the "most comprehensive reform of the political system in the history of this country." I call this a scam. If every line of the President's legislation were adopted tomorrow, the same corruption in Washington would continue—at conveniently reduced prices. The checks that buy the votes would still be signed by those who sign them now. Corporate executives and the wealthy would still call the tune.

I grew up in politics. My father rose from San Francisco district attorney to state attorney general to governor of California. He beat Richard Nixon, lost to Ronald Reagan, and missed just one Democratic National Convention in 50 years. I have been present at hundreds and hundreds of fundraising events. Maybe thousands. I have lost count, but I know I have raised roughly $20 million since the early seventies.

Contributions of $10,000 and even $100,000 are not unfamiliar to me. I have spent days on end cajoling all manner of rich and powerful people out of money to mount multimillion dollar campaigns for the U.S. Senate, the California governorship, and the presidency. More recently, as chairman of the Democratic Party of California, I collected more millions. In 1989, for example, I organized a dinner honoring Mario Cuomo at the Beverly Hilton Hotel in Los Angeles and raised $750,000. In 1990, I put on another dinner with Lloyd Bentsen at the Fairmount Hotel in San Francisco and collected $550,000. I know what I am talking about. This is about corruption, not a mere "money chase."

I know that our entire campaign system rests on the twin pillars of $1,000 donations, bundled and multiplied 10, 20 or even 100 times, and the massively repetitive TV ads and expensive mailings these $1,000 donations buy. House Speaker Thomas Foley recently said that it is a "tremendous distortion of reality" to say that Congress is getting more corrupt. That depends on what you call corruption.

The corruption I speak of is not legally defined as a felony—at least not yet—but rather is the current method of paying for American elections. You take money from the richest and best connected 1 percent to get elected and then pretend that this does not affect your judgment.

Edmund G. Brown Jr. was governor of California from 1975 to 1983 and a 1992 candidate for president. He presently chairs the citizens organization We The People, based in Oakland, California.

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Jess Unruh, the famous speaker of the California State Assembly in the sixties, coined the phrase, "money is the mother's milk of politics." He said that you had no business in politics unless "you could take their money, eat their food, drink their booze, f— their women and then vote against them." That's what I call either naive or skillfully self-deceptive.

As you might expect, Speaker Foley also defends political action committees (PACs), calling them "one of the most effective ways for people to make smaller contributions." Who is he kidding? PAC donations are managed and guided by the same elite who write the $1,000 checks, i.e., corporate vice presidents in charge of "government relations." The only difference between PACs and individual high rollers is that PACs are permitted to ante up $5,000. Of course, there are labor and liberal PACs, but these mainly act as a foil to the better-financed corporate and trade association PACs. Worse, the operatives of the so-called progressive PACs often take on the Beltway perspective of their corporate counterparts. Jeffrey H. Birnbaum of *The Wall Street Journal* describes it this way: ". . . lawmakers and lobbyists moving together in a largely closed and isolated system, discussing decisions that affect millions of other Americans."

For the Democratic leadership, the temptation is denial, to believe that they are good but practical men able to govern for all while relying on money from the few. For all the incumbents, Republican and Democrat, the tendency is to fight every effort to reduce the role of the wealthy. Enjoying as they do $135,000 a year salaries, the best health care, and innumerable perks, these men and women are insulated from the real world most of their constituents face. And it all begins with those fundraising dinners.

Pac it in

President Clinton's campaign "reform" proposals do nothing to stop this subversion of democracy. True, the cost of running some campaigns would go down under his plan, but the same type of people would remain in charge by writing large checks beyond the reach of most Americans. Only those candidates who attract the favor of the powerful will be able to amass large campaign warchests to run successfully. For the House, Clinton proposes business as usual with the same $5,000 PAC and $1,000 individual donations. The voluntary $600,000 spending limit is above the 1992 average of $557,000 spent by incumbents and way above the $169,000 spent by challengers. And even this so-called spending limit—which applies to those candidates who accept public funds—is deceptive. Candidates who win their primary by less than 20 percent can spend an additional $150,000 in the general election; fundraising costs up to $75,000 are also exempt from the limit. All this is indexed to inflation as well, which puts the "cap" at roughly $900,000 in 1996.

And the public financing provisions of the plan are so limited that they do not remove the need to raise large sums to win office. For House races, candidates may receive up to $200,000 in media vouchers to purchase radio, television, and print ads and postage only after they have first raised $75,000—not a trivial sum for those without affluent supporters. Taken as a whole, Clinton's plan leaves intact a system dependent on the same narrow sources of money.

For the Senate, expenditure limits are set between $1.2 million and $5.5 million, depending on the state's voting age population, but this "cap" does not include up to $2.75 million for primary election campaigning or cost of living adjustments. The Senate, which has already passed its version, bans PAC contributions but allows candidates to keep collecting the coveted $1,000 checks from individuals. Under pressure, the Democratic leadership, instead of fighting, quickly capitulated to the Republicans and stripped publicly funded media and mail vouchers from the bill.

Why is the Congress so incapable of changing the status quo? I suggest you look at the March 4, 1993, Federal Election Commission report on the last election. It shows that congressional campaign spending jumped 52 percent—from $446 million in 1990 to $678 million in 1992. That's more than a million dollars for each of the 535 members of Congress. House incumbents had a 5-to-1 financial advantage over challengers in 1992; senators had a 3-to-1 edge. And of the Top 40 House recipients of PAC money in 1992, each and every one were incumbents, and 37 were Democrats. Congressmen Richard Gephardt, Vic Fazio, Dan Rostenkowski, David Bonior, and John Dingell—certainly among the

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House's most influential leaders—ranked one through five, raising a total of over $5 million from PACs. In the Senate, 25 of the Top 40 PAC recipients were Democrats.

We also learn that as a group House Democratic incumbents received more than 50 percent of their $126 million in campaign checks from PACs. No wonder they resist banning PACs. Is this the party of Franklin Roosevelt and Harry Truman, of the "common man," of the hard-pressed wage earner, of those who suffer despair in our cities?

To understand how deep the hostility to change is, consider what happened to President Clinton's plan as it went through the process. Before the plan was even announced, the incumbents served notice that they would accept no drastic changes. Clinton bowed to their wishes, abandoning his modest campaign commitment to limit PAC contributions to $1,000. He also went along with postponing the law's effective date from 1994 to 1996. Then, without bothering to hold hearings in which citizens could meaningfully participate, the Senate took up the weakened bill and desultory debate ensued. Senator Paul Wellstone offered an amendment to limit contributions to $100. Just 13 senators voted yes. More amendments. More discussion. There was little public notice or media attention. Then public financing was stripped away. But the $1,000 gift remained sacrosanct and the status quo—what Kevin Phillips calls "greedlock"—held firm. Like an insidious pathogen, the ingrained practice of money politics attacks and then kills every attempt at genuine reform.

The great constitutional principle of "one person, one vote" has been betrayed and in its place we find a rogue system where the pursuit of "one dollar, one vote" takes over. And the obvious way for the public to learn about this—informed press coverage—is infrequent and thin. Reporters thrive on political combat and in the matter of campaign reform, there is more consensus than conflict among the incumbents. Their debate lacks intensity, and that discourages coverage. *The New York Times* and *The Washington Post* ritually editorialize about the need for campaign reform but dutifully embrace the empty packages the leadership puts together. Is anyone listening? Does anyone care?

What we have here is sham and pretense. The congressional incumbents will not clean up a system that insures them a flow of money to smother their opponents. As the electoral process now functions, it is the exception rather than the rule for citizens to have equal access and exposure to candidates. In this anti-democratic system, the objective of any prudent candidate must be to amass enough money to deter potential opposition, or failing that, to ensure that the quantity of their campaign messages overwhelms the opposition. For this plutocratic endeavor, money from the top 1 percent is almost always a *sine qua non.*

Dollar bills

This money driven system corrodes intelligent debate and rewards those candidates who win disproportionate access to the voters' minds through paid media repetition. It is not what you stand for but whether you can buy five or ten times more media or mail than your opponents. It is this evil that the President and Congress must address if there is to be honest reform.

- To radically reduce the influence of corporate and high income donors, the $1,000 donation must be cut to $100 and PAC contributions outlawed. When I was running for president in 1992, I asked hundreds of audiences across the country to raise their hands if they had *never* given $1,000 to a politician. Virtually all hands would go up, accompanied by laughter or disbelief. One thousand dollar donations are the prerogative of the few. A $100 limit, which is within reach of most Americans, together with the following reforms, will make the system democratic—in practice as well as in theory.

- Full public matching funds must be given for each $100 donation after a reasonable threshold has been attained. Such a system operates in presidential nominating campaigns and Democrats and Republicans alike gladly avail themselves of this form of public support.

- Significant amounts of free TV and radio broadcast time featuring the candidates addressing the viewers must be made available. Candidates would qualify by collecting a reasonable number of petition signatures. It is simply impossible for most people to ever see or hear a political candidate except through the mass me-

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dia. Without exaggeration, the mail and public airwaves are the functional equivalent today of the public square of old. That is why their political use must be democratized.

Only a plutocracy sanctions the rationing of political debate based on the ability to pay. I believe every broadcast outlet must devote at least one hour a day in a campaign's last month to debates or forums in exchange for the licenses we the people grant them. During this period, the stations would present the debates during the same primetime hour every night, free of film clips and gimmicks. Meanwhile, privately paid candidate advertising would be outlawed, breaking politics free of the 30- or 60-second commercial in which manufactured images dominate political debate. Incumbents and challengers alike could no longer use uplifting music and family dogs to sell a candidate like a Jeep Wagoneer. This would also end the dependency on quick, distorting sound-bite attacks. If the courts hold this unconstitutional, then an alternative rule should mandate that each time one candidate or party buys time, the opposition will be granted free, equivalent exposure.

- The postage for at least two district wide mailings must be made available free to all candidates in both the primary and general elections. In House races where TV is not practical more mailings should be authorized.
- Once the costs of media advertising are out of the equation, it makes sense to set low limits on spending to reflect the average experience of challengers, not the incumbents. With free TV and postage, this becomes feasible.
- Drastically limit the incumbent's franking privilege during election years. Even in non-election years, franking should be substantially cut, stopping the flow of newsletters members of Congress mail out only to propagandize the voters.

I know that nothing less will alter the profoundly disordered state of American politics. Greedlock cannot be overcome by half measures. The first step is to expose the empty reforms now before the Congress. Unless reporters, activist groups, and fed-up citizens do this now, while Congress debates the issue, the charade will continue. □

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TIDBITS & OUTRAGES

MOST VALUABLE LAWYER

The contract signed by Seattle Seahawks rookie quarterback Rick Mirer allows him to collect a bonus of $3 million without violating the National Football League's salary cap if the Seahawks win more than three games or finish higher than 28th on offense in the 28-team league.

IN A RELATED STORY, THE CITY HAS ISSUED NEW MUNICIPAL BONDS IT WILL REDEEM WHEN IT FEELS LIKE IT

The *Los Angeles Times* recently reported that L.A.'s new deputy mayor for economic development, Alfred R. Villalobos, lost $30,000 in two days of gambling at a Lake Tahoe casino in 1989, that he didn't pay off the debt for two and a half years, and only after he was sued for the sum.

"THE MAYOR HAS BEEN SO PREOCCUPIED WITH THE THEORY OF GOVERNMENT BUREAUCRATIC REORGANIZATION," SAID A SPOKESPERSON, "THAT IT'S HARD FOR HIM TO KEEP UP WITH EVERY LITTLE NEWS STORY."

In an interview, Mayor Richard Daley Jr. of Chicago gave a *New York Times* reporter "a burst of suggestions" for President Clinton. "The whole White House thing," the mayor said, "should be reorganized into a different system. He has the whole system that Bush and Reagan and Carter and Nixon created and kept it going. He needs more than one chief of staff. It's impossible!" When the reporter responded by asking whether David Gergen was a wise addition, Daley was speechless and then asked, "The Supreme Court?" Finally, an aide told Daley who Gergen was.

AND IF HE COUGHS UP ANOTHER $5 BILLION FOR HUMVEES, HE'LL REALLY SHOW THEM WHO'S BOSS

In a recent issue of *Time*, Pentagon correspondent Bruce van Voorst wrote, "Administration sources also confirmed that over the next five years, Clinton may be prepared to spend up to $20 billion more on defense than he originally promised. With Les able to offer more, Clinton might finally take real command of the Pentagon."

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Why the Party of the People Has a Grassroots Problem

. . . and how to solve it

by Jon Meacham

"A telephone blitz like this nation has never seen," Tip O'Neill grumbled. He wasn't a happy man. In the last week of July, 1981, as the House inched toward a vote on President Reagan's first budget—the one with tax cuts and a huge defense increase—the Speaker thought he had the votes to head Reagan off. But the damnedest thing kept happening: The phones were ringing in the offices of wavering Democrats—and ringing, and ringing. People were demanding that their congressmen pass the Reagan package.

"We had matched Reagan maneuver for maneuver until the phones started ringing off the wall," another House Democratic leader told the old *Washington Star.* "The deals we could withstand, but not that damn Alexander Graham Bell."

Twelve years later, in the spring and summer of 1993, the same phones were ringing about Bill Clinton's economic plan. But this time, the calls were demanding that Congress *reject* a new president's package. Conventional wisdom explains the Clinton problem these ways: It's of course more popular to cut taxes than to raise them; Clinton was elected with just 43 percent of the vote; Reagan was better at television; Clinton got sidetracked by Sharon Stone, the attorney general follies, and gays in the military; Reagan was more popular because he had been shot; and so forth.

All of these explanations have merit. But the enduring problem is that Clinton has no network approaching what Reagan could call on. The conservative grassroots booms in the eighties were products of Reagan's speeches, years of conservative direct mail, and networking meetings with activists in the White House. "Calls and letters don't

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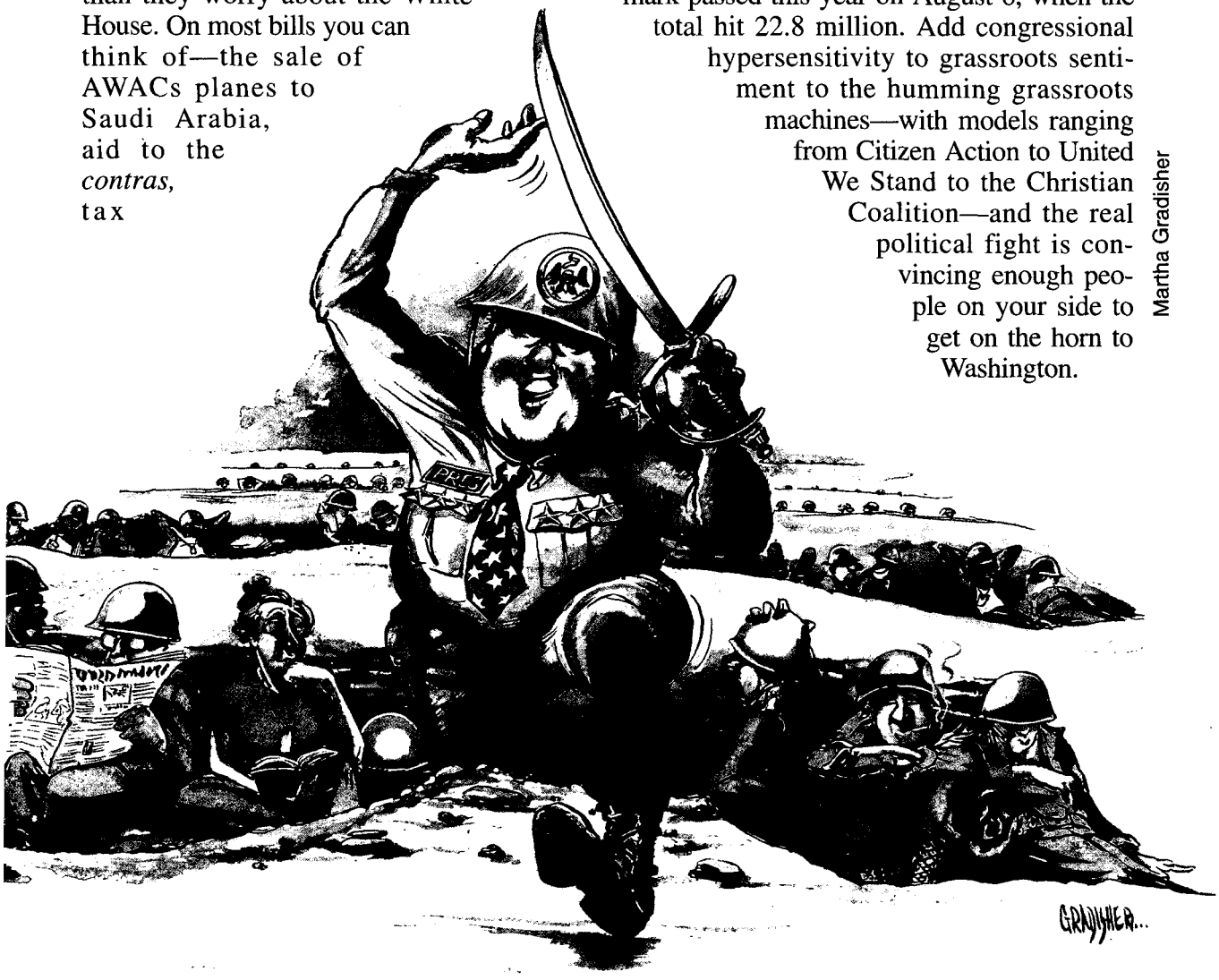
just happen," says Lyn Nofziger, Reagan's first director of political affairs. "You've got to generate them, and anybody who doesn't know that now is out of it." The callers in '93 were calling for the same thing they called for in '81: less government and lower taxes. Then, it was a call for Reagan; now, it's a call to cream Clinton.

Grassroots lobbying has exploded in recent years because lawmakers watch their fax machines, mail bags, and telephone logs more than they worry about the White House. On most bills you can think of—the sale of AWACs planes to Saudi Arabia, aid to the *contras*, tax reform, Robert Bork, Clarence Thomas—there were tight votes whose outcome seemed anything but inevitable at the time and which had lawmakers nervously taking the public pulse. In 1974, only 17 percent of Americans said they had recently contacted their representatives in Congress; today, 39 percent have. This year's Western Union Opiniongram message traffic to the Hill is up 66 percent over 1992. And the Capitol Hill switchboard logged 22.5 million calls in all of 1992—a mark passed this year on August 6, when the total hit 22.8 million. Add congressional hypersensitivity to grassroots sentiment to the humming grassroots machines—with models ranging from Citizen Action to United We Stand to the Christian Coalition—and the real political fight is convincing enough people on your side to get on the horn to Washington.



Martha Gradisher

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How are the Democrats faring at this? Badly, and that's puzzling given the party's old image as the party of the people. Take Clinton's chief initiative so far: his original economic plan. "Well, a budget is not necessarily the kind of thing that everybody goes to the barricades on," offers David Wilhelm, chairman of the Democratic National Committee, who might want to call Nofziger about whether that's the case. Clinton's original package raised taxes on the top 1 percent, invested in roads, job training, and child immunization, and expanded the Earned Income Tax Credit. Given the public's deep skepticism toward government, the budget also hung on the promise of Al Gore's reinvention. Not very concrete, of course, but Reagan was never Mr. Specific, either. Yet the people who had to balance out the conservative callers—environmentalists on the Btu tax, for example—stayed out of the fray, and Congress ate the young president's lunch. The plan's overall public approval rating fell from 71 percent in February to 43 percent in July.

Supposedly, the explanation for Reagan's success and Clinton's failure is all money (Republicans have more of it). Although it's true that the right uses expensive mail to keep its base intact, Democrats and progressives aren't poor—there are 12 million liberal donors in the country, giving $1 billion a year on 600,000,000 pieces of mail. Corporate philanthropy alone is worth about $25 million a year, and groups like the ACLU, the Children's Defense Fund, the Urban League, and the NAACP got $16.5 million, or 65 percent, of corporate grants in 1990, according to the conservative Capital Research Center.

Yet as a rule, liberals are reluctant to acknowledge that phone calls and letters—as opposed to grassroots work in the March on Washington tradition—are much more than the work of hysterical right wingers. "Liberals are more interested in principle than in victory," says Roger Craver, whose direct-mail company represents the 40 largest progressive groups, including Common Cause and Planned Parenthood. "On our side, people don't want a left wing Rush Limbaugh. It seems to offend their sense of decorum." But there are ways to rally public opinion short of conservative-baiting. By framing the issue in To-Limbaugh-Or-Not-To-Limbaugh terms, Democrats miss the real point.

Which is: It's all well and good to avoid the messiness of mobilizing mass opinion as long as you never want to win. Purists rightly argue that deliberately produced grassroots calls are a far cry from the civil disobedience of the civil rights or antiwar movements. Aren't Reaganesque grassroots productions, they say, sort of phony, more Astrodome than Wrigley Field? Yes and no. Yes, they're certainly manufactured. But no, you can't say constituents' calls and letters don't have an impact, no matter how people come to call or write.

And it's not as though liberals—the most vocal and affluent of whom are the most active Democrats—are above this when their passions are aroused—ask Judge Bork. Problem is, their passions are aroused by causes that don't arouse the vast working class. So how do you reconcile loggers with Washington's spotted owl protectors? Or God-fearing hardhats who think abortion is a sin with an elite Democratic leadership that thinks it's a "choice"?

Democrats need to recognize that for every one epic battle like Bork or abortion rights, there are thousands of street fights—taxes and spending among them—and these are the fights that engage the natural Democratic constituency: The 68 percent of Americans who make less than $50,000 a year. Right now, Democratic activists tend to be better off social liberals uninterested in populist economic issues, and the antidote for that is for the president and the party to appeal directly to the economically pressed at the grassroots. "The precinct captain in the 44th Ward of the city of Chicago needs to think of organizing around issues like health care as part of his job," says Wilhelm, "and he doesn't necessarily think that now." The precinct captain equivalents on the right and in the center—Reagan's old loyalists, Perot's new loyalists—*do* think that now.

Fax populi

This is not rocket science, but there's clearly a market for political wares that the Democrats are skipping. According to the Times Mirror Center for The People & The Press, 38 percent of Americans have recently mailed in a card for interest group "opinion polls," which are then used to lobby Congress; 27 percent have joined an organization in support of a particular cause;

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24 percent have attended a "town meeting" discussion; 22 percent have called an 800 or 900 number to register a political opinion; 19 percent have contributed money to a political action group or party. Minority voices, no doubt, but a minority voice is awfully loud when silence is the competition.

Consider the right's advantage over the left in all this. Sixty eight percent of callers to talk radio say they are conservative or lean that way; only 24 percent say they're liberal. More Republicans (39 percent) have recently contacted Capitol Hill than Democrats (27 percent) or independents (33 percent). And the people calling Congress are disproportionately down on Clinton: 43 percent disapproved of the President, compared to 31 percent of the general population.

"The trouble with us is we're always *for* something, you know?" complains James Carville, who helped elect Clinton on economic themes. "It's always easier to rally folks against something than for something." Still, there is the sentiment that gave Bush's challengers 62 percent in 1992 in an election where the percentage of registered voters voting was up over 1988. Clinton's package would have cost a family of four making $55,000 a year about $11 a month; a family of three making $25,000 would have gotten a $700 tax break. The heaviest burden—80 percent of the plan's revenues—would have come from those making over $200,000. The raw materials for a progressive coalition are out there, and Democrats obviously have to bring along some businesses as well with promises not unlike what Clinton tried to pass this time: targeted tax incentives and other carrots.

The right may have more folks calling talk radio and ringing up Capitol Hill, but the ostensibly killer 4.3-cent gas tax splits the country 50-50, and taxing most Social Security benefits for couples making over $40,000 a year wins, 51 percent to 44 percent, according to a summer NBC News/*Wall Street Journal* poll. This after six months of conservative destruction after the full plan was so brilliantly presented—so fleetingly—in the State of the Union address. Fifty percent does not a groundswell make, but it's a start.

Ironically for Clinton, what's helping fund his program's evisceration are donations from the little guys Democrats used to count on. In the 1992 cycle, individuals gave the GOP $141 million to the Democrats' $75 million. Sixty eight percent of GOP contributions came in sums under $200; the Democrats got just 38 percent that way. There's a reason for this: The Republicans, through the sixties, seventies, and eighties, developed shrewd mail, phone, advertising, and membership services. The investment—roughly $40 million from 1990 to 1992 alone—is vast, but success breeds success. That is, the more you mail, the more donors are likely to join up, and their continued giving is what makes money for the party. The Democrats, in the same period, spent just $13.1 million on outreach—a third of the Republican investment.

The failure to win small donors is less a function of not having money to invest than it is a consequence of the party's choosing a different route in the past. Because Republicans were outpacing them and bringing in more money to reinvest in more and better appeals, the Democrats took the easy way out and peddled the party to wealthy individuals and corporations. "For a long time, the Democratic party has been a rich man's sandbox," says Tom Mathews, a veteran liberal fundraiser. "That gives the big donors an enormous amount of clout, but it doesn't help with keeping people down below in the fold." So while party leaders in the Robert Strauss/Ron Brown tradition convince corporations like Beneficial Management Corp. to pay $265,000 for a single dinner, Clinton's DNC chairman, Wilhelm, couldn't find a list of Democratic county chairmen on file when he came into office. And Republicans and their conservative allies are able to tar Democrats as the real Washington insiders, taxing and spending and social engineering.

This spring and summer, for example, Citizens for a Sound Economy (CSE), a conservative business coalition with 250,000 members, used direct mail to raise over $1 million to spend on television, newspaper, and radio ads in key states to fight Clinton's budget. Very early on, when Clinton proposed a broad tax on energy, CSE and the American Energy Alliance, another pro-business coalition, targeted 28 marginal House districts and four Senate Democrats from Montana, Oklahoma, North Dakota, and Louisiana. To pressure David Boren, CSE ran full page ads in 19 Oklahoma

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newspapers three days in a row. It advertised a number to call (1-800-NO-TAXES) to be patched through to the Capitol switchboard. Meanwhile, the Republican National Committee, delighted with the assist from private industry and conservative groups, merrily raised $19 million in the first six months of the year—70 percent of it from small donors. The money helped pay for radio ads targeting 30 House and Senate Democrats in 20 states. With background music from "Jaws," the announcer warned, "It's Bill Clinton and the tax-and-pretend Democrats in Congress at it again. . . ."

But where, for example, was the $500 million environmental movement on the pro-green energy tax? "He frankly lost his base for an organized effort by caving on mining and grazing fees," says Pamela Gilbert of Ralph Nader's Congress Watch. "That lost him the environmentalists completely. And scaling back the stimulus package lost him a lot of the rest of us." Alas, what is good about interest groups' ability to gin up calls and letters is also what is sometimes bad. Passion allows little room for nuance or compromise. "A lot of Clinton's priorities—especially the Earned Income Tax Credit for poor people—were fabulous," says Jennifer Vasiloff, head of the Coalition on Human Needs, an umbrella group that includes the Children's Defense Fund and the League of Women Voters. "But while Clinton reached out to us, he was also reaching out to real estate groups and corporate America, and some of the people in my coalition didn't like or didn't care about that."

If progressives seem like kids squabbling over ice cream, that's because progressives are, well, sometimes like kids squabbling over ice cream. Unfortunately, the Democratic party can't play parent. The right has its intramural problems, too, but the New Right and the Republicans sort of grew up together—Phyllis Schlafly's Eagle Forum and the Moral Majority were very much at home with the GOP, for instance—while the groups on the left were largely founded to *oppose* the established Democratic party. Beginning in 1968, feminists, consumer advocates, and early environmentalist groups were of the Democratic party but not really in the Democratic party: Their agendas came first, the party a distant second.

Think about the kinds of people who, by and large, are progressive donors and activists. They are the people who broke with Lyndon Johnson over Vietnam and who value principle and precision above the give-and-take of politics. They are largely well-off and well-educated (75 percent are college graduates or better, according to a Peter Hart survey of liberal activists, compared to 20 percent of the general population) and tend to work in government or the academy. While such people in the thirties, forties, fifties, and early sixties were sources of great liberal reform, as they have entered the professional and upper middle classes, their ardor for economic justice has waned. When liberal activists were recently asked by Hart what their primary area of concern was, a plurality of men said the environment (38 percent) and of women said abortion rights (30 percent). Taxes and economic issues don't show up on the radar screen (even animal rights, with a 5 percent rating, beat the economy). Conservatives and moderates, on the other hand, tend to be more broadly concerned with, say, taxes and government (they want less of both) and they know how to reach people with symbols to sell that agenda, even when the result is contrary to the working class' economic interests. Democrats have to fight back, as distasteful as that might be to their sensibilities.

Take 1988. Bush is pummeling Dukakis with these stump lines: "I can't understand the type of thinking that lets first degree murderers who haven't even served enough time to be eligible for parole out on parole so they can rape and plunder again and then isn't willing to let teachers lead the kids in the Pledge of Allegiance."

In his 1992 book *Speaking American*, David Kusnet, a progressive organizer who is now Clinton's chief speechwriter, makes a revealing point about the sort of people who were in charge of Dukakis' campaign. According to Kusnet, these Democrats insisted that "the only legitimate issues are those where the candidates can spell out exactly what they'd do if elected. . . [So] these experts were honestly bewildered that George Bush could discuss state and local concerns—like furloughs, saying the Pledge of Allegiance in public school classrooms, and pollution in Boston Harbor—and get away with it." Everybody knows, the liberal thinkers muttered, that these aren't *federal* concerns. But viscera won out over nuance, as it usually does in politics. To be sure, Democrats should not want their campaigns to feature progressive Willie Hortons, but emotional

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economic images are perfectly fair. Reagan notwithstanding, much of the most effective twentieth-century political imagery comes not from Republicans—quick, quote a line from Dwight Eisenhower—but from progressive Democrats like FDR, Truman, and the Kennedys, all of whom rhetorically elevated the common man's interests above those of the corporate and social elites. ("We have nothing to fear. . ."; "We can do better. . .")

Kusnet knew that; for a long time, Dukakis didn't. He told Kusnet, who was writing for him in 1988, to stop using the phrase "country club Republicans" in stump speech drafts. "Some of his friends in the suburbs belonged to country clubs now, Dukakis said," Kusnet recalls.

"What we've got in the White House is way too much Brooks Brothers and way too little Sears, Roebuck," laments Jim Hightower, the populist Texas Democrat.

Clinton and Wilhelm understand the imperative for populist language. That's why Clinton talked about "the people who do the work, pay the taxes, raise the kids, and play by the rules" in 1992. Too late this spring, the DNC began airing ads urging voters to call to "stand up to the special interests." (In fact, when the DNC ads ran, people were so saturated with anti-Clinton feeling that the ads produced more *negative* calls than positive.) If Clinton can deploy those images again, that's half the battle. The other half could be won if Democrats followed the example of two of Clinton's 1992 rivals: Perot and Jerry Brown. Their 800-numbers circumvented old political institutions—national committees, think tanks, foundations—to build lists of donors and volunteers. Wilhelm is beginning to test the power of the $15 contribution, combined with regular newsletters, in a "Democratic Action Network" to build machinery from the ground up.

But given Clinton's romance with insiders like the people who surrounded Dukakis, wholesale populism is unlikely. While Clinton drew his strongest support from low income voters—his biggest margins came among the 68 percent of voters who make less than $50,000 a year—he has surrounded himself not with Carvilles but with a crew on loan from Wall Street. "What we've got in the White House is way too much Brooks Brothers and way too little Sears, Roebuck," laments Jim Hightower, the populist Texas Democrat. According to a survey by Knight-Ridder Newspapers, 80 percent of the President's first 518 appointees were from the Washington-Boston corridor or the West Coast; one third attended Harvard or Yale or both.

The tensions between Democratic populists and elites are underscored by the season's top political draw: health care. The administration's approach is suggested by this recent *Los Angeles Times* headline: "Health Reform Backers Need to Enlist the Haves." Uniting haves and have-nots would of course be ideal, but Democrats most need to convince then mobilize the have-nots—the under-$50,000 households that are either uninsured or are terrified of losing coverage in the current system and have no wealth to fall back on if they lose their job.

This is Clinton's great test: A majority of Americans would benefit from reform, and the president needs a grassroots boom to pass the plan. Yet managed competition is complicated and difficult for anybody to understand and support. Why is the plan so complicated? Because the Clintons and the Democratic elites insisted on preserving private insurance at the center of American health care instead of pressing for single payer to control costs and cover everyone in a straightforward, explicable way. But single payer would mean abolishing the powerful insurance industry, and the Clintons have declined to fight that fight, remaining bound to economic elites who make up a minority of the country but a majority of the governing class.

For Clinton to reach the breadth of the country (the have-nots), he has to follow up on his powerful health care speech to Congress in a way he failed to do after the State of the Union. And he must consistently make clear that he intends real, ward-level change in people's lives—making government work better, making health care and college loans available for everyone, and making taxes work for the country as a whole. Members of Congress could be persuaded that it is not political suicide to raise tax-

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es *if that case is made.* Even in the election after the 1990 federal budget deal raised the top marginal tax rate, Citizens for Tax Justice points out that 96 percent of House incumbents who ran were re-elected—the fourth lowest turnover in U.S. history. The Senate turnover was the lowest in three decades.

In the 40 states that have raised tax rates since 1978, the turnover rate for lawmakers in the next election is virtually identical to turnover in elections that followed no tax increase. In fact, in 45 percent of the cases, turnover was *lower* than usual. Here are three well-thought-out progressive campaigns which resulted in smart progressive economic reform—without a right wing backlash. Beltway Democrats, take note:

➤ In Connecticut in 1991, Governor Lowell Weicker persistently supported the state's first income tax, vetoing three budgets that failed to include one. As a reward, he was burned in effigy and spat on in person at a rally of 40,000 at the State Capitol in Hartford. Weicker, running as an independent in the 1990 gubernatorial race, had won—shades of Clinton—with 41 percent in a three-way campaign. Facing a $2.7 billion shortfall (or 35 percent of the state's $7.5 billion budget), Weicker supported and won a 4.5 percent income tax, with progressive exemptions, and a 2-point cut in sales and corporate taxes over two years. A grassroots coalition—Citizen Action, human service advocates, and unions—put aside old social differences, realizing a disastrous economy would hurt them all. Business slowly came round, too, looking forward to the offsetting sales and corporate cuts. "We used mainstream concerns," says John Marttila, a Boston political consultant who worked with the Connecticut coalition. "We punched middle class equity, used door to door and radio spots. Traditional handwringing about government wasn't going to work." At the ballot box, 90 percent of pro-tax candidates won.

● In Massachusetts in 1990, in the waning days of the Dukakis governorship, a progressive alliance defeated Question 3, a provision ostensibly tailor-made for the era of No New Taxes. The largest percentage tax rollback ever to appear on a state ballot, Question 3 would have cut the state's income tax rate and rebated $2 billion to taxpayers (or 15 percent of the $13 billion state budget). At the beginning of the campaign year, voters favored the rollback, 60 percent to 35 percent. But beginning in 1987, blue collar workers worried about state contracts and Birkenstocked lefties worried about social services had come together to work the precincts. A significant segment of the business community came to agree that pulling the plug on the state budget would mean economic chaos. Bumpersticker slogan? "It Goes Too Far." In the end, Question 3 lost, 60 percent to 40 percent.

● In California in 1980, an alliance led by Mickey Kantor defeated Proposition 9, the second anti-tax campaign led by Howard Jarvis, who was fresh from Proposition 13's victory in 1978. Dubbed Jarvis II, Prop 9 would have cut state graduated income taxes by $4.9 billion. Early polls showed a 2-to-1 majority in favor. But then Vic Fingerhut, a Democratic pollster, tested the line that the big windfall would go to the wealthy; according to economics journalist Robert Kuttner, 30 percent of the tax cuts would have gone to the richest 3 percent of Californians. Fingerhut devised radio and TV scripts emphasizing the rich's tax cut would be paid for out of "someone else's pockets"—"working and middle income people." It worked. Prop 9 collapsed on election day, 61 percent to 39 percent, after a six-month campaign.

Although these are not torchlit, Huey Long populist revolts, they are victories that could be replicated on the national level. Clinton was the first Democrat since Hubert Humphrey to carry Connecticut; in Massachusetts, Republican William Weld defeated Democrat John Silber on the same day Question 3 lost; California's victory over Prop 9 came the year Reagan was first elected president.

Most important, such coalitions make the best of old ward politics by organizing around an issue that means something to people—jobs, services, schools, bread and butter—instead of distant things like the ozone. In the ward, the issue might have been a new traffic light or getting the trash picked up; now, in an interactive political age, it can be something as big as the federal budget. Why is it that only Republicans know that shouting at Washington gets its attention? Democrats have plenty to say, but they have to do more than clear their throats if they're to be heard. □

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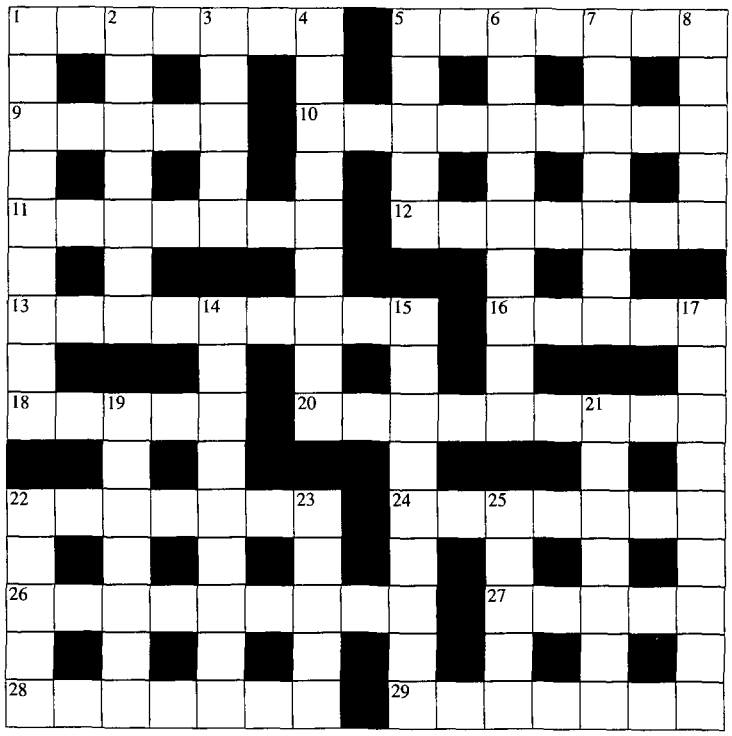
POLITICAL PUZZLE

by John Barclay

The numbers indicate the number of letters and words, e.g. (2,3) means a two-letter word followed by a three-letter word. Groups of letters, e.g. USA, are treated as one word.



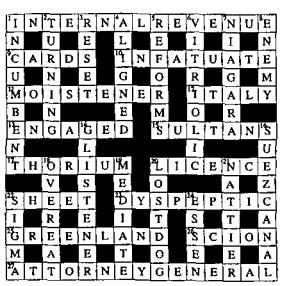
ACROSS

1. Savagely nuke IRA or *New Republic*. (7)
5. *New Republic* features sex in song. (7)
9. Gave medicine changing odds about starting early. (5)
10. Rains strangely inside temporary abode for traveller. (9)
11. Second publication about bone of contention? (7)
12. Hit snag before it was first. (9)
13. It charges, indirectly, a foreign legislature. (9)
16. Way to go throwing leis after alohas start. (5)
18. Mud slung back around at given information. (5)
20. Another reorganization: ten fired with fresh start. (9)
22. Carefully remitre craft. (7)
24. Extra protection from range component around railroad turn. (7)
26. Awkward grip in sin is awesome. (9)
27. Heirs shifted county overseas. (5)
28. *New Republic* lost ego air after going first. (7)
29. *New Republic* makes us abler. (7)

DOWN

1. For student, special grandeur before first degree. (9)
2. Composer confused sins in French king. (7)
3. River manufacturing without try. (5)
4. Begged for attender shaking with energy. (9)
5. Change likely about prosecutor. (5)
6. To grind rarely is a tame act. (9)
7. Phonograph elements around 550 points. (7)
8. Played current senator. (5)
14. Pesky noise makes him German. (9)
15. Reconstruct fat fig bog for oral facility. (4,2,3)
17. Used to prolong former offers? (9)
19. Rouse sitter before one o'clock for attempts. (5,2)
21. Real ire displayed beforehand. (7)
22. Extraordinary night object. (5)
23. Show end of native returning. (5)
25. Standard of luxury before fifty. (5)

Answers to last month's puzzle:



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Beyond Paper Cuts

Eight smart ways to make real in-roads to deficit reduction—and make smart investments

by Charles Peters

In December 1992, two of Bill Clinton's top economic advisors, Roger Altman and Lawrence Summers, wrote the president-elect a private memorandum wargaming the first Clinton budget's economic goals. The two men—they are now top deputies to Lloyd Bentsen at the Treasury—argued that a deficit-reduction target which stabilized the growth of debt to the growth of the economy (a figure that turned out to be $500 billion) was "the least ambitious deficit target that is defensible." Guess what target the President settled on? Not surprisingly, $500 billion.

When Congress finally passed the plan by the landslide margins of two votes in the House and one vote in the Senate this summer, the president hit the hustings. "Now we can truly say change has come to America," Clinton announced at one rally at the State Capitol in my old hometown of Charleston, West Virginia.

Or has it? Even by the president's men's own admission, what Clinton got this year was the bare minimum. The Congressional Budget Office's own figures, too, indicate that the public debt will actually grow from 52.5 percent of the gross domestic product in 1993 to 54.6 percent by 1998 and still higher thereafter—meaning that the $500 billion wasn't enough to begin with. So despite the President's cheerful words, true change won't come until Washington clears out the kudzu of stubborn subsidies, untouched benefits for the well-off, and tax loopholes that escaped pruning this year.

In that spirit, the *Monthly* would like to suggest how Clinton and Congress can free up money to cut the deficit and help pay for programs that are really needed. They were on the right track when they expanded the Earned Income Tax Credit and raised the top income tax rates—steps which put money in the pockets

Charles Peters is editor in chief of The Washington Monthly. *Research assistance was provided by Steven Rosenfeld.*

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of the working poor while making the rich pay their fair share. Only 4,442 West Virginia families will pay higher income taxes while 105,000 families will get tax breaks—a small economic stimulus package on its own.

This is only the first step. While Clinton has tried to push a few of our cost-cutting ideas through Congress—freezing federal pay and ending ludicrous subsidies—Capitol Hill has resisted. We hope the President presses on, adopts the ideas he hasn't already, and that Congress will see the wisdom in taking money from bureaucrats, well-off entitlement junkies, and speculators to pay for rebuilding our roads and bridges, providing universal health care, and investing in education to create a better workforce.

Take just one example: Each year, the United States admits 800,000 new legal immigrants without investing in rudimentary training in English. These people, once in the workforce, could jumpstart the economy for everybody. But there is no federal money to teach them English, and churches in New York are holding lotteries for limited spaces in volunteer classes. As Bilga Abramova, a 35-year-old Russian refugee, told *The New York Times* at her third time through such a lottery, "My future is on hold. Without English, I cannot begin a new life. I do not want to depend on welfare. That is shameful."

So for the deficit chickens on both sides of the aisle, and for Clinton, here are cuts that would give people like Ms. Abramova a chance:

● ***Freeze federal salaries. Savings: $29 billion by 1998.***

One of Clinton's most courageous stands this year, sadly lost in the fallout from Cristophe's tarmac coiffing and the succession of Nannygates, was targeting the 2 million-strong federal civilian workforce (total payroll=$107 billion) for a pay freeze. Too tough on the feds? Consider this: Civil servants make an average of $36,279 in the U.S. and $45,000 in Washington; pay can go as high as six figures-plus for top bureaucrats. Meanwhile, the average private sector worker makes $26,758, and only 10 percent of private workers make as high a salary as a third of civil servants do.

Nevertheless, the well-connected federal employee unions wanted a 2.2 percent pay raise worth $3.1 billion in 1994. A big problem with all federal salaries (which Clinton has not acknowledged) is that they are based on job descriptions written by the feds themselves, not on the job they really do. That means the responsibilities of a file clerk, with minimal literary flair, can begin to sound a lot like Julius Caesar's. The government then takes these embroidered descriptions to companies, who read them and say what a comparable job in the private sector would pay. But because the descriptions are inflated, so are the private salaries on which comparability is based. The feds also wanted an additional $1.8 billion in "locality pay" to pay workers who live in costly cities more than those who live in cheaper ones. While it makes sense to pay workers who live in Los Angeles or New York City more to get by, there ought to be corresponding locality pay *cuts* for civil servants who live in places like Arkansas or Tennessee where federal salaries (set by Washington standards) make the local federal administrator better paid than the local bank president. Moreover, in a classic bureaucratic con, the feds are leaving their generous benefits out of the locality calculation in order to drive up the locality raise, the justification for which would often disappear entirely if the benefit package were taken into account.

Clinton rightly proposed killing the 2.2 percent raise, and though he should have tried to focus locality raises in the expensive cities

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where they are really needed, he did try to delay the scheme. This would have saved $28.7 billion over five years—66 percent of Clinton's discretionary savings in his original budget. But he got rolled, with employees' unions railroading lawmakers into authorizing the spending. Yet there's still hope: The money to pay for the double-barreled raises has to be specifically appropriated by Congress by January. The President ought to press for a rollback and go again for the jugular in 1994. This is big money, going to people who are better paid and have considerably better benefits than what corporate America offers its employees.

And while Al Gore's recommendation to eliminate 252,000 jobs is promising, that's just 12 percent of the workforce. When Conrail was on the verge of disaster in the eighties, it cut 61 percent and gained market share. Union Carbide has cut 22 percent and is planning more; in 1992, it was the best performer in Dow Jones industrials, rising 92 percent. Losing 20 percent of federal employees saves an additional $9 billion a year. To encourage new investments to put victims of downsizing back to work, see our plan for capital gains on page 34. [See "Myth Information," Jon Meacham, July/August 1993, "Building America To Last," Matthew Miller, January/February 1992, and "How to Cut the Bureaucracy in Half," Scott Shuger, June 1990.]

Raise the civil service retirement age to 62. Savings: $5 billion by 1998. Defer cost of living adjustments (COLAs) for federal and military pensioners until age 62 and means test them thereafter. Savings: at least $6.5 billion by 1998.

Another bureaucratic scam is the sweet deal retired federal government employees and military retirees enjoy from government pensions, which the President avoided this year. That's amazing, considering the $60 billion a year Washington spends on federal retirement is more than the government spends a year on higher education, consumer safety, Aid to Families with Dependent Children, food stamps, AIDS research, and low-income housing *combined.* And the big trouble is ahead. The government's "unfunded pension liability"—the amount by which planned pension benefits outstrip workers' contributions—in the federal civil service alone is $600 billion. Add in military expectations and the total exceeds $1 trillion. That's just at the federal level—states, cities, and towns are facing an aggregate liability of $160 billion to $450 billion.

A major cause of this federal shortfall is that civil servants can retire with full benefits at age 55 after 30 years of service. That's why 362,892 federal civil pensioners—or one in four—are still in their fifties. Servicemen and -women can retire after 20 years, while they are still in their early forties, and as a result 90 percent of military retirees are nondisabled and under age 62. Both military and civilian retirees can therefore become double or even triple dippers, bringing in a government pension, Social Security, and possibly a third pension from a mid-life job. There's nothing wrong with that, of course, so long as the rest of us aren't footing the bill for overly generous pensions and cost-of-living adjustments that grow faster than inflation. Just raising the civilian retirement age to 62 would raise $5 billion over five years.

COLAs in government pensions were uncommon until the years after 1969, when the country was at last paying the bills for Vietnam and was suffering the shocks of two giant oil price hikes.That period of inflation ended about 1982, but the government retiree programs continued to fund generous COLAs—now a $2 billion a year tab—and federal employee and military retirees came to look on the COLAs not as a temporary helping hand in inflationary times but as an entitlement.

Instead of adjusting COLAs downward when inflation fell or giving them only to people whose overall income is low, COLAs became permanent features for the public sector. The difference between the government and the private sector on this is vast: In 1991, all federal employees and 50 percent of state and local employees had this benefit. How many private sector workers had it? Just 5 percent.

COLAs have gone wrong for two reasons. First, they are compounded every year, piling COLA on top of COLA. Second, they are applied indiscriminately to all retirees instead of protecting the marginal pensioner from inflation. Deferring COLAs until age 62—hardly onerous—would save $6.5 billion over five years. Means testing the COLAs for well off pensioners would save even more money while protect-

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ing those on the margin. [See "A Pension for Trouble," Matthew Cooper, July/August 1989.]

● ***Means-test Social Security COLAs. Savings: $8.25 billion by 1998.***

We are delighted that Clinton and Congress agreed to tax 85 percent of Social Security benefits, but this is just the first step toward a sane Social Security system. Because of increases in the Social Security tax in the eighties, poor workers saw their tax burdens rise by about 28 percent while the system funded the retirements of the Rockefellers and silver-haired Rotarians at two to 10 times the amount they paid in. Though we would prefer that the working poor and lower middle class receive breaks and that the affluent pay taxes on 100 percent of benefits (and would *really* prefer a means test to strip the rich of Social Security benefits altogether if their income is more than $100,000 a year), there are signs of support for means testing COLAs for Social Security.

On the night the Senate passed the Clinton package, Senator Alan Simpson went on ABC's "Nightline" to discuss the vote. There, guest host Barbara Walters pressed Simpson on issues where the Republicans might join ranks with Democrats in the coming year. "You're going to help on entitlements?" Walters asked Simpson, who answered: "Sure. But Al Gore talked to me just after the election and he was talking about something we all ought to talk about. We have to do something with cost-of-living allowances for people, we have to start means testing, we have to do these things and we have to do it together. This is where you join hands and go over a cliff."

It's a leap worth taking, and we hope Simpson is serious about federal retiree pensions and about Social Security. According to the CBO, freezing Social Security COLAs across the board for just one year would save a whopping $46 billion by 1998. However, we believe in protecting the person who's living on the edge and genuinely needs a COLA to keep up with the cost of living. Why not pay the full COLA for people making less than, say, $20,000 a year, and take it away from those with more than $50,000 of household income? According to data analyzed by Phillip Longman and Neil Howe for *The Atlantic* in 1992, 20 percent of Social Security's outlays—or $55 billion—go to households making more than $50,000. Take the COLA away from them and you save roughly $8.25 billion by 1998, assuming 3 percent inflation.

Done with care, this rectifies divisions resulting from the fact that in the eighties, Social Security, Medicare, and federal pension benefits paid to households making over $200,000 doubled. Meanwhile, households with incomes less than $10,000 lost 7 percent of their federal benefits. The vote to tax 85 percent of benefits—and Simpson's remarks—shows that there is a realistic possibility we can stop wasting money on people who are already affluent. [See "The W-2 Step," James Bennet, June 1991.]

● ***Limit the home mortgage deduction to a set percentage. Savings: $21 billion by 1998.***

Home ownership is so much a part of the postwar American world that you'd think only an Eddie Haskell affecting a Socialist pose would suggest the great picket-fenced middle class is ripping the country off. But homeowners can deduct mortgage interest expenses from their taxable income—even though homes do not produce any taxable income. The case for such deductions is based on the not unreasonable assumption that they encourage home ownership and improvement. That's true, of course, but the size of the current deduction is generous by any standard. In fact, although no other kind of consumer interest has been deductible since 1991, home mortgages amount to a *$50 billion* yearly subsidy from all taxpayers to homeowners.

Capping the deduction at just $12,000 for single filers and $20,000 per joint return would quickly raise $21 billion, and these limits are higher than what 95 percent of homeowners claim. If these caps were adopted, the CBO says, only mortgages of $250,000 or more would lose *any* of the deduction, and only 4 percent of new mortgages in 1992 were in that high priced range. This way, only those people well-off enough to consider luxury homes or vacation houses would be affected at all.

● ***Cancel the space station and the Supercollider. Savings: $16.5 billion by 1998.***

There's more nibbling going on around these two behemoth projects than at a lobbyist-sponsored cocktail buffet, but the clear answer is to be done with them both. The space station has

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already soaked up $9 billion with no objective or end in sight. If NASA can't talk to its own satellites, how can they host a permanent slumber party in space? The same goes for the Supercollider, the darling of Don't-Tax-But-Spend-in-Texas Senators Phil Gramm and Kay Bailey Hutchison. While Clinton reduced the size of the projects cloaked in rhetoric about "smaller, more focused missions," there are too many problems back here on Earth to justify shooting billions into space and into research about radioactive decay.

Freeze Medicare payments to hospitals for one year; lower subsidies to high income recipients; strip surgeons of their raises for Medicare-funded patients. Savings: $22 billion by 1998.

We are wary of proposing too much on Medicare because we hope the Clinton health plan, which will surely involve a restructuring of Medicare, will give the rich and poor equal access to the same level of care. Still, there are a few money-saving steps that could immediately be taken.

First, for all the squawking about the $56 billion in Medicare "cuts" this year, only the program's automatic *growth* was somewhat limited. Freezing payments to hospitals produces $15 billion in savings over five years and would force hospitals to be more efficient. House Republicans sensibly proposed means testing the Medicare deductible for beneficiaries making over $100,000 to make them pay the first $2,000 of hospital costs instead of the current $697. Also, cutting subsidies on Medicare's supplemental insurance for couples making $125,000 and phasing the subsidy out for those making over $200,000 would bring in $6 billion.

One glaring mistake ought to be corrected right away. In the budget deal, Clinton and Congress raised the government subsidy to one of the richest sections of society: surgeons. By including surgeons in the 8.9 percent raise in the fee schedule—mean U.S. surgical income is now $223,800, compared to $111,500 for family doctors—the Democrats caved to a major special interest. How's that for shared sacrifice?

Raise the estate tax and close the angel-of-death loophole. Savings: about $80 billion by 2000.

As we have pointed out in recent issues of the magazine, the new way to get rich quick in this country is to inherit. There's a $200 billion annual transfer of wealth going on between baby boomers and their parents, who are dying off. And 97 percent of estates now go untaxed. Changing that and closing the angel-of-death-loophole which exempts capital gains tax on stock sold after it's inherited would raise, by some estimates, $80 billion by the year 2000. [See "Brother, Can You Spare My BMW?" David Segal, April 1993, and "The Secret Solution to the Deficit," Paul Glastris, January/February 1991.]

Give capital gains tax breaks to investments in new jobs. Savings: billions.

The more businesses and governments downsize to make themselves efficient, the more people will be out of work. This could have the terrible result of cutting the number of customers these new, lean corporations will have—and the number of taxpayers for the government—unless new plants and businesses are opening to take up the slack.

While Congress passed a break for small business capital gains held for over five years, it's imperative that Clinton keep his campaign promise to reward people who invest in job-producing stocks and startups across the board. Now, the tax code makes no distinction between the investor who takes a risk by investing in a new company and who sells, say, five years and so many new jobs later and the speculator who buys 10,000 shares of AT&T on Monday and sells them on Tuesday. The first man deserves a tax break; the speculator, whose in-and-out trading encourages company managers to maximize short term profits at the expense of the long term good of the company (and, in the big picture, of the economy), shouldn't get a break. Now, investors pay 28 percent capital gains regardless of whether it's a job-producer or a speculation; making short termers pay the same higher rate on their stock deals that they pay on ordinary income will save billions. And a targeted cut will encourage investors to put their money where it counts: Investments that mean new jobs. [See "No Dollars, Common Sense," Charles Peters, December 1992.]

Our suggestions, added to what Clinton and Congress did this year, come to about $610 billion by 1998. They ask something of the middle as well as the rich; without both, nothing can be seriously accomplished. That said, we would not put *all* of these savings toward deficit reduction. A third of it, about $200 billion, should go to making good public investments in roads, education, and health care. Now *that's* real change. □

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MEMO OF THE MONTH

GOVERNMENT OF
THE VIRGIN ISLANDS OF THE UNITED STATES

OFFICE OF THE LIEUTENANT GOVERNOR

RECEIVED
AUG 16 1993
PHIL KEISLING
SECRETARY OF STATE

DEREK M. HODGE
LIEUTENANT GOVERNOR

Hon. Phil Keisling
Secretary of State
136 State Capitol
Salem, OR 97310

August 10, 1993

Dear Phil,

I take this opportunity to personally invite you and members of your staff to participate in the NASS Winter Meeting to be held on St.Thomas, United States Virgin Islands. Conference dates are January 8-12, 1994 at the beautiful Marriott Frenchman's Beach Resort. The theme of this conference will be *"Doing More With Less"*.

Our theme reflects the very real dilemma facing state governments: providing increasing services in the face of shrinking resources. To be successful, state officials must go beyond the reinvention of government, and couple this reinvention with reengineering. This is the radical reexamination of the very processes which drive the engine of government. Instead of focusing solely on the end product, we must also be concerned with the path taken to arrive at the end product.

Our speakers will offer insights on the dual tasks of reinvention and reengineering. In addition, speakers with a uniquely Caribbean perspective will speak of governing and governance. The very important Project Democracy program is the perfect backdrop for discussion on democracy in the Caribbean Basin.

In addition to an interesting and informative slate of speakers, we have some special events planned for you which will showcase our abundant and unique natural resources. Besides the sun, sand and sea, I intend to introduce you to our most important natural resource, the people of these Virgin Islands!

I am asking your assistance in the preplanning of this meeting, and I would appreciate some indication if you and/or your staff are planning to attend. This does *not* serve as the official notification, but it will give my staff some early indication as to the number of attendees they will have to accommodate. Enclosed is a form you can return to my office.

Thank you in advance for your cooperation, and I look forward to seeing you at the Winter Meeting.

Sincerely Yours,

Derek M. Hodge
Lieutenant Governor

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Beaten and F

The black comedy of a White Hou nervous breakdo

by John Podhoretz

"It's the worst job in the world," said Sam Skinner. "Howard Baker said that when he was Reagan's chief of staff. The worst."

One month after Bush's defeat on November 3, 1992, and Skinner was in his Elba, eating three kinds of popcorn out of a tin cylinder eight inches wide and two feet tall. The tin was that year's omnipresent holiday offering; every Republican office in Washington was inundated with popcorn supplied by friendly lobbyists, every word processing keyboard stained with the icky orange residue of the cheese flavoring and the sticky brown goo of the caramel. Skinner's place of exile was a handsome office suite on the fourth floor of the Republican National Committee building on Capitol Hill. It had been his perch since August, when James Baker replaced him as White House chief of staff.

Skinner had arrived at the White House just a year earlier, in December 1991. He was chief of staff for eight months, and in all that time he never had a good day. The first major event of Skinner's tenure was the president's trip to Japan in January 1992. That was followed in turn by the unsuccessful State of the Union address, and then Bush's first campaign trip to New Hampshire, in which he attempted to demonstrate to people that he cares about them by speaking the immortal words "Message: I care." And on and on it went, through an unbroken series of disasters and missed opportunities: the Rio summit, the Los Angeles riots, the great

John Podhoretz, who served as a speechwriter to President Reagan and as a special assistant to drug czar William Bennett, is a partner in the White House Writers Group, a speechwriting firm. This article is adapted from his book, Hell of a Ride: Backstage at the White House Follies, 1989-1993. *Copyright c. 1993 by John Podhoretz. Published by Simon & Schuster.*

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saying Baker was the key to the reelection. But he had believed Baker either would be put in charge of the campaign or would come into the White House as a Super Counselor. Either way, Skinner figured he could keep his title and some of his duties. So he had been shocked when, on an August Wednesday right before lunch, the president informed him that come ten the next morning, Skinner was to be banished from the White House.

Skinner's evisceration came as a kind of spiritual deliverance to the White House staff, not because they disliked him but because their sense of justice had at last been satisfied. Things had gone horribly wrong, and somebody was finally taking the fall for it. The president's decision to bring Baker on had confirmed their conviction that the problem lay in Skinner's faulty management. Skinner, and only Skinner, had been the cause of all the administration's troubles in 1992. Skinner's failure was not only a danger to the country's future, but an even more immediate threat to the livelihoods of the White House staff.

The Baker team played this opinion for all it was worth. In the myriad articles written about Baker's takeover of the White House, Baker's people spoke of little else (on background, of course) but the parlous state of the place in Skinner's wake. The clear implication was that if Bush did win in November, the credit would be entirely Baker's, but if he lost, Skinner would be the one responsible.

But on that December day after the election, Skinner was actually one of the few Republicans in town cheerful and upbeat. He had just landed a $500,000 job as chairman of Commonwealth Edison. So while hundreds of his former employees woke with night sweats trying to figure out how, as loyal employees of a disgraced administration, they were going to meet their mortgage payments, Skinner was returning to his hometown, Chicago, perhaps a bit bloodied but basically unbowed. (Upon hearing of Skinner's hiring, one staffer immediately began calling around and with mock urgency advising his friends who might own stock in Com-mon-

Victor Juhasz

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wealth Edison to "sell short, for God's sake, sell short!")

But there was plenty of blame to go around for the defeat. Skinner certainly thought so: He constantly cited the role of his predecessor, John Sununu, and campaign chief Bob Teeter while belittling the significance of his own eight months in the chief of staff's office. Those months had proved to be merely an interregnum between Sununu and Baker. "I was just an asterisk in history," he said, only he pronounced the word "asterik." It was, evidently, an important word to him; later, he dismissed a midlevel staffer's role in a key policy decision that year by calling her an "asterik," too.

What had made the job especially frustrating, he said flatly, was that he had inherited "the weakest staff in White House history" from Sununu. "You won't find anyone to disagree with that," Skinner said. "It was just hopeless."

Out of the mouths of babes: Skinner had stumbled onto the truth. The management problems of the White House preceded his time there and did not go away when he left. The management problem of the White House was George Bush, and the singularly inept way he structured his own operation.

By dissing the White House staff, Skinner had merely put into words something that had been evident to people in the administration and elsewhere in Washington from January 20, 1989, onward. The White House staff, almost every member of which had been hired by Sununu himself, was astoundingly mediocre—politically shortsighted, ideologically deprived, inclined to inflate the importance of the trivial and discount the significant.

When the Bush administration began, Bush filled a few of the top jobs himself and left the rest to Sununu, his first chief of staff. The president's insouciance about the structure and order of his own political operation turned out to be a key indication of how he was going to pursue his presidency. Having spent eight years doing nothing but retail politics in his effort to get elected, he now wished to cleanse himself, to rise above it. He would leave all that to his famously brash and tough chief of staff and focus his attention on his consuming interest, foreign affairs.

While Bush was hunkering down with National Security Adviser Brent Scowcroft and Secretary of State Baker, Sununu was busy assembling a White House manned by senior staffers whose chief assets were that a) they would owe extraordinary allegiance to the chief of staff for elevating them above their natural stations in life, and b) they would pose absolutely no threat to his complete dominion over all aspects of White House policymaking.

The weakness of Sununu's staff was made manifest in the White House communications operation, which he drastically downgraded from its previous high standing in the Reagan White House. A Reagan-era director of communications was either a celebrated or glamorous figure in his own right or soon became one—David Gergen was the first, Pat Buchanan the second. The director of communications supervised the dissemination of the White House's message through speeches, media appearances and, of course, strategic leaking.

Sununu's choice for the post was David Demarest, who had had the title during the campaign. But what he had done as director of communications for Bush/Quayle '88 was almost exclusively technical—setting up satellite feeds for candidate interviews, keeping track of which local media organs the candidate needed to hit on his relentless journey around the country. During the campaign, Demarest was not a speechwriter and did not participate in the making of policy, nor did he design a strategy to publicize and promote the candidate's ideas.

Sununu took advantage of Demarest's inexperience to gut the speechwriting operation, the most significant arm of the communications office. Now, the idea that a president didn't need especially good speechwriters might seem insane, especially when that president was George Bush, but Sununu and Bush had decided to pursue a communications strategy designed by press secretary Marlin Fitzwater. (The press office under Reagan and Bush was independent of the communications operation.) Fitzwater's recommendation was that Bush make policy announcements and speak to the American people not through speeches but in press conferences and informal interview sessions instead. Sununu kicked the speechwriting department out of its nice digs, and gave them instead to the deeply

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significant Thousand Points of Light office. Following this, he decreed that speechwriters would no longer be allowed to eat in the White House Mess. What was more, no speechwriter would be paid more than $40,000.

But of all Sununu's choices for the White House staff, easily the most consequential was Roger Porter. Porter was named assistant to the president for domestic policy. This is the title that had been given to Edwin Meese in the Reagan White House. Meese, perhaps Reagan's closest personal adviser for twenty years, wanted to be to domestic affairs what the national security adviser was to foreign affairs—chief White House analyst and check on the ambitions of power-hungry bureaucrats in the cabinet departments and agencies.

It never quite worked out that way. Foreign affairs are relatively easy to supervise from the White House because they are the responsibilities of only three outside departments (State, Defense and Central Intelligence). Almost everything else is domestic policy, and the sheer size of the federal government has dwarfed all efforts by domestic-policy assistants to achieve the degree of supervisory authority enjoyed by the national security adviser. (Meese had also gutted the position, when he left the White House in 1985 to become attorney general, by arranging to remain chairman of its two cabinet forums, the Domestic Policy Council and the Economic Policy Council.)

Even so, the position of domestic policy adviser was one of almost limitless possibility. Unfortunately, Porter proved a man of almost infinite limits. At a time when the Republican party was a wild ferment of new ideas and policies in fields from education to welfare, Porter proved singularly uninterested in the ideas and instead obsessed over detail—not what to do, but how to do it. One of Porter's chief aides said he "was narcissistic about the paper on his desk"; he held up the release of documents from his office because he insisted on reading every word himself, sometimes complaining about the spacing of the tabs.

A visitor to Porter's office noted that pride of place was given to a photograph of Porter himself in the company of none other than the first president he had served, Gerald Ford. Porter made frequent references to the Ford presidency, during which he had served as a paper pusher, as if that were the model that the present administration should emulate.

When a rumor circulated that Nick Brady was dyslexic, his people hotly defended him by saying, No, he's not dyslexic, he just had to read things really slowly. This gave rise to one of the era's meanest cracks: It took Bush so long to acknowledge the recession because Brady was the person who drew the charts.

From the first day of the administration, Porter served as a kind of kid brother to the two actual domestic policy advisers, Sununu and Richard Darman. His status as an underling was confirmed when he accepted the job of taking the official notes at domestic policy meetings with the president. Porter's weaknesses led to the marginalization of the often creative staff of wonks who made up the Office of Policy Development under his tutelage—another set of thinkers and potential policy competitors disposed of.

Sununu and Darman did their best to marginalize most of the cabinet as well. They were following the lead of Richard Nixon and Henry Kissinger, who joined in a conspiracy to turn Secretary of State William Rogers into a powerless figurehead. But that was only one Cabinet secretary and one department; Sununu and Darman tried the same thing on no fewer than ten. Sununu would, whenever he felt the need, simply dictate policy from his office; Darman would, on the other hand, assert White House dominance and limit cabinet prerogatives by fiddling around with department budgets.

They were successful enough at this to wrest control of the economy away from Treasury Secretary Nicholas Brady—which might have seemed a major feat, since Brady was not only treasury secretary but Bush's best friend in Washington.

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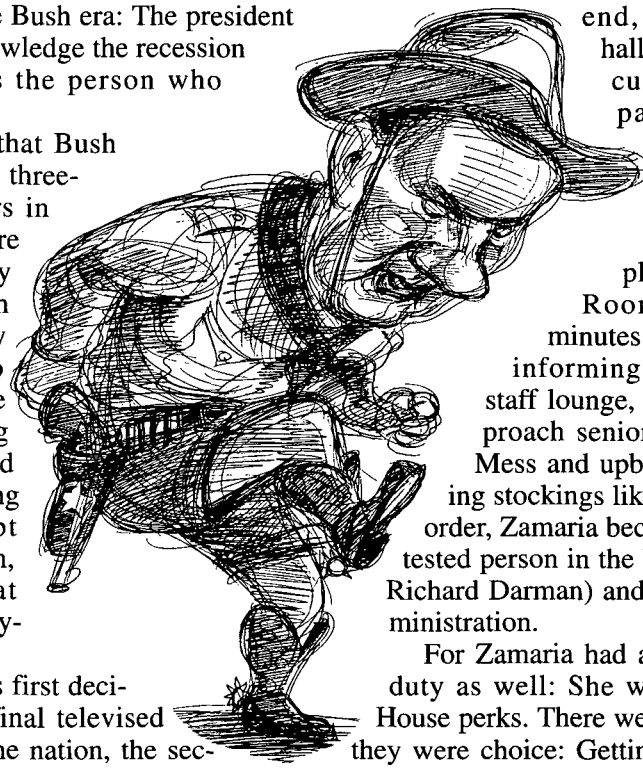
They found it easy to dominate Brady because it is never difficult to outwit a dimwit. When a rumor circulated around Washington that Brady was dyslexic, his people hotly defended him by saying, No, it wasn't true he was dyslexic, he just had to read things really slowly because otherwise he couldn't understand them. The dyslexia rumor gave rise to one of the meanest cracks of the Bush era: The president took so long to acknowledge the recession because Brady was the person who drew the charts.



The few choices that Bush did make among the three-hundred-plus staffers in the White House were as telling in their way as Sununu's, for with one exception, they were people of no fixed opinions on the key issues affecting the country. They did not believe in anything very much except George Bush the man, and that was what mattered to the loyalty-crazed president.

He cited one of his first decisions in one of his final televised appearances before the nation, the second presidential debate. Asked what women he had as his closest advisers, he blanked for a minute and then spoke the words: "There's Rose Zamaria. Tough as a boot, saving the taxpayers' money." The comment provoked groans all over Republicanland, and on the plane back from Richmond, Virginia, White House aides told each other that the "Zamaria debate" would go down in history as Bush's worst political moment. (A questionable proposition, given the wealth of choices.)

Zamaria, who had been Bush's secretary when he was a congressman in the mid-1960s, was not exactly the sort of high-ranking policy aide you might expect a president to name when asked about his closest advisers. But she was certainly close to him; he saw Zamaria every day, which gave her standing many other more important staffers lacked. She was the person Bush put in charge of White House administration, supervising the secretaries and in possession of the (theoretical) key to the supply closet. She appealed to one of the less attractive aspects of his Yankee upbringing—the parsimony for parsimony's sake that is a snobbish corruption of the Puritan emphasis on the godliness of thrift and the sin of waste. To that end, Zamaria roamed the halls of the West Wing, accusing people of taking paper clips home with them from the office, making sure that her "girls" were not lollygagging, ordering people out of the Roosevelt Room if they arrived ten minutes early for a meeting by informing them that it wasn't a staff lounge, y'know. She would approach senior female staffers in the Mess and upbraid them for not wearing stockings like a lady should. In short order, Zamaria became the single most detested person in the White House (including Richard Darman) and probably the entire administration.

For Zamaria had another, more important duty as well: She was in charge of White House perks. There weren't many of these, but they were choice: Getting entrée into the president's box in the opera house of the Kennedy Center and obtaining cuff links and tie clips with the presidential seal and signature on them were primary among these. In the Reagan years, it had been a matter of course for staffers to get into the box; it was first-come, first-served, informal.

Unlike Reagan, Bush saw the perks as a political tool. Zamaria was administering the official White House favors because Bush wanted someone stingy to keep track of what he had done for his people. Gracious Bush certainly was, but never selfless. Every kindness on his part, or in his name, was considered payback for services rendered or an advance on services owed.

The hiring settled, Sununu's White House staff worked according to the wishes of its designer. He had control of policy. He negotiated with Congress.

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Sununu's fall from power in 1991 came about not because Bush was unhappy with the quality of the White House staff, but because the press scandal over Sununu's travel had become a political liability at a time when Bush's sinking ratings in the polls called for some kind of major change. Since the president was not willing to introduce a major economic growth package, or even to apologize for having raised taxes in the 1990 budget deal, he had to make a personnel move. Sununu went. Skinner came.

Skinner's choice for domestic policy czar was Clayton Yeutter, a man famous having the most impressive collection of Rolodexes in a city that worshipped the Rolodex as an aborigine worships his totem. But nobody ever accused Yeutter of having an idea in his head, which is what a domestic policy czar is supposed to have.

Bush, however, refused to allow his new chief of staff to fix what was broken. Just before his arrival at the White House, Skinner gave an interview to *The New York Times* in which he suggested he might want to make serious staff changes—an understandable wish for a new manager who had been brought in because the previous management had fallen into disrepair. But Bush, always unhappy to see such things in print, scolded Skinner for speaking so publicly. Perhaps as punishment for the indiscretion, he told Skinner in no uncertain terms that the White House staff was his, Bush's, staff. He was not unhappy with their work. One or two major changes were as many as he or they could handle. Bush didn't want much to change.

The main change during Skinner's tenure was not his new appointments but all the meetings. All there were were meetings. Endless meetings morning, noon and night. Scheduling meetings and communications meetings. Campaign meetings and Policy Coordinating Group meetings. Like a character in a movie by Bunuel, a staffer would enter the Roosevelt Room for a meeting and find that he and his companions were prevented by some mysterious force from rising and leaving the room.

Skinner got so bored and annoyed by the ditherings at the morning staff meeting that he resolved to restructure it by reducing the number of those in attendance from twenty-five to ten, and then created a weekly session called the chief of staff's meeting to give senior staffers something to hang on to.

One by one, the senior staffers who had been disinvited came to Skinner. Media adviser Dorrance Smith said he really had to be at the morning meeting because otherwise how could he best advise the president on his media appearances? And Skinner, perhaps mindful of the fact that Smith played tennis with the president twice a week, relented.

Thousand Points of Light chief Gregg Petersmeyer said he really had to be at the morning meeting to coordinate the efforts of his national service office, which did "interface" regularly with the public out there. And Skinner relented. Over the course of a month, almost everyone who had been disinvited from the senior staff meeting somehow made his or her way back into the room, until only two or three were left out—excluded, stewing, offended. The senior staff *meeting* had proved more powerful than the chief of staff.

Later, when not only was Skinner in Elba but Bush was soon to be in an exile of his own, Skinner complained again and again that Bush's loyalty to his staff made it impossible for Skinner to fix what was wrong at the White House.

Actually, Skinner hadn't the least idea how to fix things. His only idea was to enlist the services of New York management consultant Eugene Croisant, who also happened to be his best friend of thirty years. When he first took over as secretary of Transportation in 1989, Skinner had called on Croisant and found him invaluable in helping to turn his disparate staff into a team. This goal had been achieved by means of management retreats for the department's senior aides, where they played games together so that they could learn to trust each other.

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You might think that these touchy-feely, New Agey, post-1960s techniques would be anathema to Republicans, but you would be dead wrong. Management programs like Croisant's have become part and parcel of big business culture, which believes that conflicts and even failures can be solved and resolved by a weekend at a really nice resort where people get to respect one another's space and emerge with a whole new collegial spirit they can take back to their corporate headquarters and proceed to use in running yet another major American industry into the ground.

Croisant wandered through the White House for three weeks, asking staffers what they did and why. In the end, he made two recommendations to Skinner that any mildly intelligent member of the White House staff could have told him in thirty seconds. First, he recommended that Skinner hire a new director of communications to replace David Demarest. Skinner then spent two pointless months trying to hire Jim Lake, who had been communications honcho in the '80, '84, and '88 campaigns, but after a month's jockeying Lake decided he could not afford to leave his lobbying business. Whereupon Skinner halted his search,

Working in the White House

A senior staffer reflects, August 1992:

Being in the White House is hypnotically compelling. In her book on the White House, Peggy Noonan said everybody there is happy, but not everybody is good. Well, you don't know about happy or unhappy, but you do notice that you and the people who work with you can hardly bear to leave the premises once you arrive there at 7:00 a.m. Acquaintances and friends and journalists want to take you out to lunch—which means leaving the complex grounds—and the thought fills you with a vague anxiety, as though they'll cancel your access when you come back and strip you of the all-important blue pass with your photo on it. After all, you can always go grab lunch at the staff table in the Mess, where you can sit around and gossip and feel that delicious feeling you can never quite get over that you are Inside the Inner Circle, that you are part of the hottest clique in the world. And in the Mess, the Navy men who serve you call *you* sir, like you outrank them, when in fact you probably wouldn't have made it through week four of basic training with them.

Your own job is your aphrodisiac. You are hypnotized by yourself, by your work, by your responsibilities, even if they seem petty and stupid to you most of the time. You have been permitted access to the sanctum sanctorum, even though outside the complex you are just another Republican dweeb, attacked by the media, demonized by the popular culture. Only your beeper, indicating a call from the White House operator, stays at your side to remind you that You Are Somebody. You miss it when you are away, and are thrilled, even when the pressure is intense, to arrive at the gate in your car (since you have one of the coveted spaces inside the complex), have your trunk searched for a bomb and then get waved through with a poker-faced expression by the Secret Service guys. You feel the calm that comes with the sense that you have attained one of life's ambitions.

When you attend a party on the weekends, probably a barbecue or something where you can bring the kids and ditch them with other kids so that, once again, you do not have to spend all that much time with them, you do not dress like a bum but you are still very casual—Dockers and polo shirts, which get tighter as the months go by because you don't really get a chance to get to the gym and those cookies in the Mess are really first-rate.

The party, this studied concession to the idea that you are a real person with a real life, proves to be mostly work nonetheless. For you find that you must uphold the good and the true and the beautiful about George Bush even in these few hours of mindless socializing.

These parties have usually been a pleasure because, let's face it, you are a big shot in the eyes of people who do not work in the White House. Even though you know that you don't have any real power, that you are just a paper pusher, that the real power in this administration is closely held by about five or six people at the top, in Washington even the proximity to power is an aphrodisiac.

What goes around comes around. There's a guy at this party who was a senior official in the Reagan Defense Department and is now a consultant.

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explaining later that it was a very hard job to fill and he simply could find no other candidates among the 250 million residents of the United States of America who could do it besides Lake.

But he wanted to fire Demarest, anyway. Bush, who was very fond of Demarest, would not allow it. So instead Skinner gave Communications to Marlin Fitzwater, who already had more than enough to do running the White House press office. He made Demarest, who was no speechwriter, chief speechwriter. He then defenestrated the previous chief speechwriter, Tony Snow. But he didn't get rid of Snow either. Snow was moved across the hall from his office and was named director of media affairs, which basically allowed him to collect a salary, keep up his mortgage payments, and keep his health benefits while his wife had their first child. So as a result of this first piece of management advice, there were speechwriters sitting around who weren't allowed to write speeches, a communications director who was too busy with his real job to supervise three different White House offices, and

"You are hypnotized by your work, even if it seems petty and stupid to you most of the time."

When you were working at one of the less significant Reagan departments and encountered him at a party, he did that looking-over-your-shoulder-to-find-somebody-more-important-to-talk-to thing. Now he's standing in the semicircle that has formed around you, a supplicant for information and gossip. For it's not only who you know in Washington, it's what you know, and when. If a civilian gets hold of some White House dirt that hits the papers four days later, his stock will rise meteorically. Evans and Novak say Boskin yelled at Skinner—*Oh, yeah, I heard that*, the civilian can say. And he says it with worldly ennui, as though it is tough to be so knowledgeable, so incapable of surprise.

Parties and barbecues are therefore pleasurable stroking sessions for you. But this one early on takes on a vaguely disquieting turn. As usual, those in attendance at the party want to grill you about your work, your life. But you are now working for a man who is daily the focus of stories about impending political doom, and if you feed the crowd your own dissatisfaction or fears you may be feeding a fire you really want doused. . . .

A mid-level staffer frets, October 1992:

The happiness that first greeted James Baker's takeover of the White House and the campaign in August was quickly tempered by your fears that he might fire you and everybody else. And though you had prayed devoutly for Baker's arrival in June and July, you soon learned there is no such thing as a *deus ex machina*. Baker has no magic powers. Once again, an inflated Washington reputation is punctured by its proximity to the reality of the Bush White House. Baker's influence is felt nowhere. This is still Bush's White House, still indecisive, still ideologically confused, still "reactive" instead of "proactive," to borrow the inelegant terminology of the New Paradigmers.

The only good laugh in those days came when somebody handed you a piece of paper and said, "Have you seen this?"

It had a White House letterhead, and was addressed to "Mr. John Hinckley, St. Elizabeth's Hospital, Washington, D.C. 06969."

"Oh, my God," you said. "The correspondence unit sent a letter to Hinckley?"

"Read it," your friend said, so you did:

Dear John:

Barbara and I hope you are making good progress in your recovery from the mental problems that made you try to assassinate my predecessor, Ronald Reagan.

The staff at St. Elizabeth's tells me that you are doing just fine and may be released soon.

"This is a disaster!" you said. "What if Lois Romano at *The Washington Post* gets ahold of this?"

"Go on," your friend said.

As you probably know, I have decided to seek a second term of office and I hope I can count on your support and the support of your fine Republican parents in my re-election campaign.

I hold no grduge against you, John, and I hope that if there is anything you need at the hospital, you will let Barbara and me know.

By the way, did you know that Bill Clinton is fucking Jodie Foster?

Sincerely yours,

George Bush —*J.P.*

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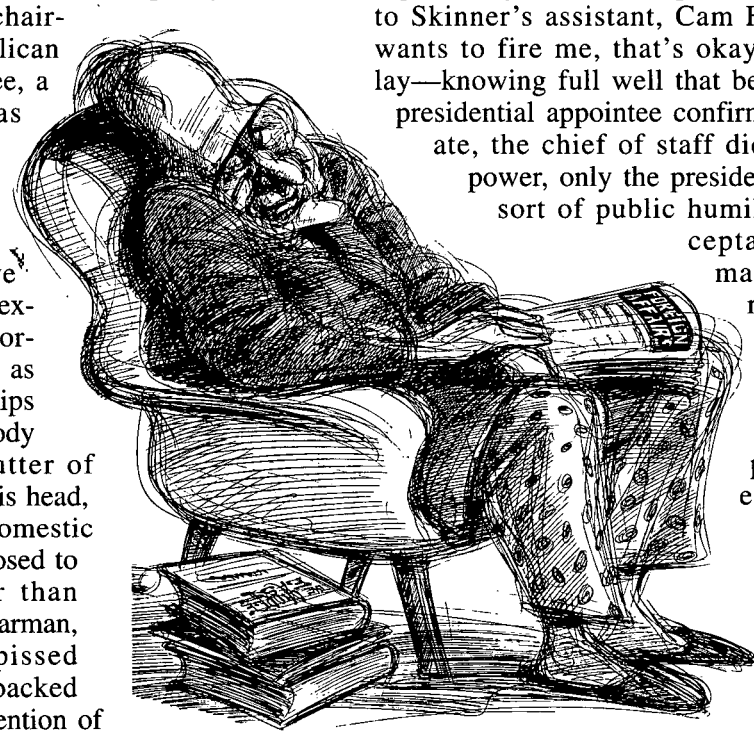
a bunch of employees who were either overworked, unqualified or disgruntled—just the sort of thing you hire a management consultant for.

Croisant's second and more significant recommendation was that Skinner create a counterbalance to Darman's total control of domestic policy by appointing a new domestic policy adviser. His choice for domestic policy czar was Clayton Yeutter, chairman of the Republican National Committee, a nice man who was famous in Washington for emptying his in-box every day and having the most impressive collection of Rolodexes in a city that worshiped the Rolodex as an aborigine worships his totem. But nobody ever accused Yeutter of having an idea in his head, which is what a domestic policy czar is supposed to have. And rather than counterbalancing Darman, Skinner merely pissed him off and then backed down from this intention of marginalizing the OMB director.



To begin with, on the very day of Skinner's arrival at the White House in 1991, he was quoted in *The New York Times* as saying, "Dick Darman is a smart guy and he will be one of—and I stress one of—the president's close advisers." Sununu and Darman had been so close that their offices had special phones that rang directly between them; Skinner had Darman's "drop line," as it was called, removed. Darman lay low until three weeks later, when Skinner was quoted in a *National Journal* article calling Darman "a nice young man."

For reasons only a psychiatrist could understand, this remark drove Darman (who was only three years younger than Skinner) into a frenzy. He raged like Lear to his two closest aides, Tom Scully and Bob Grady. He was going to get Skinner. He was going to cut his balls off. That pip-squeak didn't know who he was dealing with. He was going to call Junior—"Junior" being the misappellation for Bush's son George W., who served as a back channel to the president for select staffers.

Darman got hold of himself and called Skinner's office. The chief of staff was traveling that day, so Darman passed his message on to Skinner's assistant, Cam Findlay. If Sam wants to fire me, that's okay, he told Findlay—knowing full well that because he was a presidential appointee confirmed by the Senate, the chief of staff did not have that power, only the president did—but this sort of public humiliation is unacceptable. And Darman proceeded to read through all the statements Skinner had made about him to the press, citing each one by newspaper or magazine, page number, column number, and paragraph number. "I am not going to allow my reputation to be destroyed," Darman told Findlay.

Skinner and Darman ended up that December 1991 afternoon in the deputy chief of staff's office and had a "full and frank discussion," as the State Department briefers in the 1980s used to describe heated negotiating sessions between the U.S. and the Soviets. Skinner acknowledged that he should not have dissed Darman in print but acknowledged that he wanted a domestic policy operation in the White House independent of the OMB director.

He didn't get one. Yeutter was not equipped for the task, and in any case had only twenty people working for him while Darman had two hundred career analysts working for him at OMB who could run numbers and come up with a report about a hundred times faster than the

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Office of Policy Development.

And so Skinner found himself again in the same situation he had been in over the directorship of communications: Although he had hired Yeutter, Bush would not allow him to fire the previous domestic policy adviser, Roger Porter. So there were two domestic policy advisers in the place, both of whom had call on the same underlings.

Finally, even Bush had to act. So Baker came to the White House and Skinner was out.

Five days after his firing, while he was still technically chief of staff, Skinner was in Houston at the Republican National Convention. It was Tuesday night, August 18, 6:30 p.m., in front of the J.W. Marriott Galleria Hotel, and it was time for Republicans to head out to the Astrodome. Cabinet secretary Ede Holiday and her aide Jay Lefkowitz emerged from a small cocktail party hosted by Dan Quayle looking for Holiday's car. Holiday's driver told her the authorities had insisted the car be parked in a lot around the corner and not in front of the hotel to keep the streets clear. As a result, nobody's car was where he expected it to be; White House counsel Boyden Gray was pacing in front of his hotel, looking confused and a little desperate. Holiday and Lefkowitz and driver headed down to the corner, where they bumped into Skinner and his wife, Honey.

Holiday and Honey blew air kisses at one another as an unsmiling and preoccupied Sam said, "You have any idea where the cars are?"

"We're going around the corner to see if our car is there," Holiday said. They continued along the cobblestoned sidewalk, Honey's high-heeled shoes losing the war with the cobblestones. As they turned the corner, there was only the one car, Holiday's, in sight.

"Well, I don't see ours," Skinner said.

And Ede Holiday, who only six days before would have ordered Lefkowitz to go find Skinner's car or made the ultimate sacrifice of insisting that he take her car—only fitting for a man who only six days before had played a gigantic role in her professional and emotional life—now merely said, "Okay, good luck, Sam. See you later, Honey."

As they crossed the street to the lot, Lefkowitz murmured sadly: "Jesus, the guy can't even get a *ride*." □

The Washington Monthly

JOURNALISM AWARD

FOR JUNE 1993 IS PRESENTED TO JOHN HANCHETTE, PAUL BARTON, AND BEN KAUFMAN

Gannett News Service

In 1992, the United States spent $24.9 billion to jail 1.3 million prisoners—a per prisoner cost of $20,072 in a nation that spends just $4,000 per public school pupil. In the aftermath of the Lucasville, Ohio, prison riots this spring, a team of Gannett reporters set out to detail for a mass newspaper audience what was producing so many convicts. In a month-long, four-part series, the reporters found what the *Monthly* has long argued: That the mandatory drug sentencing laws of the eighties, although designed to alleviate the growing public fear of violence, are making the problem of crime and punishment worse.

Although the prison population has increased by 70 percent since 1981, violent crime has still risen 23 percent. Why? Because only a small proportion of the new convicts are directly involved in violent crime; in fact, 62 percent of them are doing time for minor drug offenses. And to make room for the nonviolent drug offenders, dangerous criminals often go free. But instead of just reciting the statistics, the series concluded by showing what the real world cost is: As the feds and the states foot ballooning prison bills, other needs—like education and roads—go unmet because of politicians more interested in slogans like "do the crime, do the time" than results.

The Monthly Journalism Award is presented each month to the best newspaper, magazine, television, or radio story (or series of stories) on our political system. Nominations for any newspaper, magazine, or radio or television station in the country are welcome. The subject can be government in its federal, state, or municipal manifestation. Please send nominations to Monthly Journalism Award, 1611 Connecticut Ave. NW, Washington, D.C. 20009. Two copies of the article or broadcast text should accompany the nomination.

Nominations for stories published or aired in September will close October 15. The winner will be announced in the January/February issue.

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The Wins of War

Fighting the Nazis brought Americans together and turned the economy around. Could something less cataclysmic do the trick today?

by Nicholas Lemann

A Democracy at War: America's Fight at Home and Abroad in World War II
William L. O'Neill, *The Free Press, $24.95*

World War II would rank right at the top of the list of subjects most likely to defeat any attempt to fulfill the writer's basic mission: "make it new." The war is too immense (could it be the single most extensive human endeavor in the history of the world?) and too well written about already by everyone from Anne Frank to Winston Churchill. To fit the whole thing into a single volume, even one limited to the United States side of it, means severely compressing dozens of subjects that have themselves filled many long books: Ike and FDR, the atom bomb and D-Day, the end of isolationism and the beginning of the Cold War.

William O'Neill, who specializes in contained histories of entire eras in American history, has not solved the difficult problem he has posed for himself in the most obvious way, which would have been to write a straightforward, textbook-like history of the war. He assumes some degree of familiarity on the part of the reader with the basic story, which allows him to weigh in with his own views on many of the persistent controversies about the war. One chapter, for example, argues that strategic bombing was morally and militarily this country's greatest failure in the war effort, and another excoriates Churchill for insisting on a major Allied thrust through northern Africa, Sicily, and Italy, instead of agreeing to a much earlier invasion of France.

O'Neill does, however, have a stated main purpose to his enterprise that would appear to be unifying and fresh. From the vantage point of today's dispirited America, what seems perhaps most amazing about World War II is that we won: When's the last time this country (and in particular the federal government) seemed both so completely in the right and so competent? The war is impervious to being demythologized: Over the last few years writers of the caliber of Studs Terkel and Paul Fussell have tried to drain it of nobility and succeeded only in reminding us of how bloody the fighting was. Because the country feels itself to be so un-puissant today, the question of how we could have pulled off such a triumph now seems compelling—as it wouldn't have in 1950 or 1960. In effect O'Neill has set for himself the task of explaining what magic secret we as a society possessed then that we no longer have: hence the second word in the title.

What O'Neill does very well is make it clear that conducting the war was not as smooth sailing as it now appears to have been. He takes a degree of devilish pleasure in creating a picture of a country that was just about as screwed up then as it is now. Before Pearl Harbor, although preparedness was the great national task (much more obviously than, say, deficit reduction is today), we didn't prepare because politicians were unwilling to ask vot-

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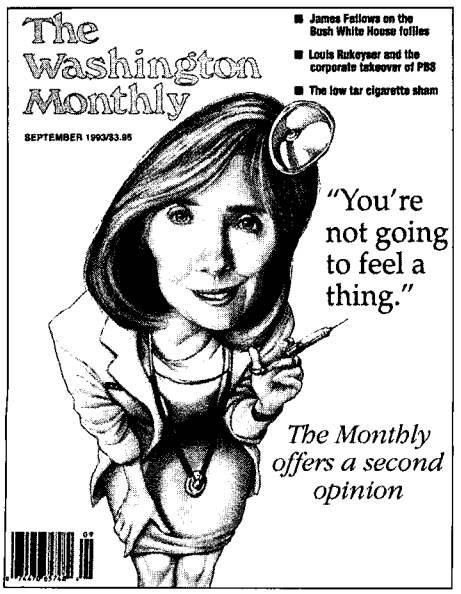

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ers to sacrifice. Even at the height of the war, let alone beforehand, Congress wouldn't pass a bill requiring universal national service. FDR had Clinton-like tendencies to waffling and disorganization: "Access to him was limited and capricious. Important men cooled their heels outside his office while nobodies who had caught his eye engaged the President's attention. Letters were answered or not, as fancy dictated. Often the President made conflicting pronouncements on the same subject."

After Pearl Harbor, the war effort entailed a constant struggle not only against the Axis powers but also against hindrances coming from our own side. Monday morning quarterbacking with relish, O'Neill provides many examples of Allied snafus. Our allies forced on us bad strategic ideas, such as the invasion of Italy. Our military commanders regularly acted out of vanity and egomania and were often ignorant of the most fundamental truths about modern warfare, like the futility of the frontal assault. Many of the main American weapons of the war were inferior: the Sherman tank was under-powered and thin-walled, the B-17 Flying Fortress couldn't hit ships, the Mark XIV torpedo had a detonator that wouldn't go off. Interservice rivalry was so intense that, for example, command of the Pacific Theater was divided between the Army and the Navy, with disastrous results.

Being reminded of all this only adds oomph to the question of what the key to our victory was. O'Neill's answer lies mainly in a deterministic view of "democracy" as the source of our weaknesses and our strengths. A democracy, he believes, must be slave to lightly considered public opinion, which is why the country couldn't get over its knee-jerk isolationism until Pearl Harbor. A democracy is fatally attracted to romantic foreign policies over realistic ones, which is why we didn't adopt the kind of Kissingerian geopolitics that he seems to favor, and instead foolishly supported the likes of Chiang Kai-Shek, a move which unnecessarily turned Japan into a blood-enemy. In America, O'Neill says, "nothing important can be done until the need is overwhelmingly obvious."

On the other hand, once we were in the war, democracy was the guarantor of our triumph. How? Here, unfortunately, at what is the key point in his argument, O'Neill doesn't have much to offer except platitudes. We were "a proud people who subscribed to a common culture based on work, family, respect for institutions, and faith in self and nation." We were "a people whose resolution would not fail." Because of the prevalence of high school sports, "the young Americans of that era were team players and fierce competitors." Americans "more so than now accepted responsibility for their acts and did not uphold personal gratification as the be-all and end-all of life."

O'Neill subscribes wholeheartedly to the view of the war that was purveyed at the time in Bill Mauldin's cartoons: The American soldier, plain as an old shoe, skeptical of authority, oblivious to the high-minded purpose of the war, was nonetheless a tough, brave, unstoppable fighter whose virtues made up for the vices of the preening MacArthurs and Montgomerys. As grandly Lippmann-like as O'Neill is in discussing diplomacy and military strategy, about ordinary Americans he is pretentiously unpretentious. One longs for some kind of social or economic theory that would more elaborately explain the strength of American society in the 1940s—but that would seem to O'Neill like fancy-pants intellectual stuff.

So *A Democracy at War* is not a book that pursues its self-assignment in a complete, disciplined way. Instead it is really a review of the war that lies in some middle ground between the page-turning popular histories of writers like William Manchester and Cornelius Ryan (with whom O'Neill can't compete for readability) and the more argument-driven work of academic historians like John Lewis Gaddis and John Morton Blum. As the post war era begins to draw to a close, it's possible to feel World War II becoming more like the Civil War, a great event of enduring fascination but one that is moving inexorably into the hands of the buffs. Because of their wholesale avoidance of military service, members of the baby-boom generation may have trouble even following O'Neill's discussion, not knowing the difference between strategy and tactics or between a corps and a division. But anyone who grew up more obsessively familiar with the ship movements at Midway and the relative strengths of the Mustang and the Messerschmidt than with Ted Williams' batting average will find O'Neill's work interesting and impressive.

He gives the impression of being too tough-minded to believe any half-baked argument: For example, though he comes across as conservative (by historian standards, anyway), he effectively destroys the leading conservative bromide about the war, which is that our "sellout at Yalta" in 1945 consigned Eastern Europe to nearly half a century of communist dictatorship. As early as 1942, O'Neill points out, the American high command knew that post-war Soviet domination of the Eastern Front was highly likely, unless the U.S. and Britain invaded Europe immediately—which was impossible partly because America (thanks to the conservative isolationists) wasn't ready yet. He also has little use for the liberal bromide that dropping the atomic bomb was avoidable. A two-day conventional bombing assault on Tokyo in March 1945 killed more people than the Hiroshima bomb. The battle of Okinawa, which lasted throughout the spring of 1945, left enormous American, Japanese, and civilian casualties:

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Our troop casualty rate was 35 per cent. Extrapolating from such figures (as the American high command did at the time) generated a mind-boggling picture of the bloodshed that would be involved in an invasion of Japan itself, which was the only alternative to dropping the bomb—and besides, "In a democracy the existence of the Bomb compelled its use."

It's possible that there is no lesson of World War II for America today except for the unpleasant one that for a vast, economically depressed industrial nation, a major, unquestionably just war fought entirely on foreign soil solves a lot of problems. The economic-stimulus effect of the war, as O'Neill reminds us, was stunning. In one month, November 1943, the labor force of Detroit grew from 396,000 to 867,000. Mean family income rose by 25 per cent in constant dollars from 1941 to 1944. Consumer spending in 1944 was equal to total national income in 1941. In 1945, a Gallup Poll posed the question, "Have you made any real sacrifice for the war?" Only 36 percent answered yes.

In addition to the economic boom it set off—which, remember, lasted on and off until 1973—the war also brought the country together in a spirit of shared effort in service of a noble cause, and led to the dethroning of the Episcopalian ruling class of the day (even as that class capably ran the war effort). It ended the dominant (though now forgotten) ethnic tensions of the first half of this century—involving what we now call "white ethnics"—in a blaze of assimilation, and laid the groundwork for the civil rights and feminist movements. The war advanced science, technology, education, transportation, and a host of other fields. But, getting back to the unpleasant thought, it could be that it took the real, immediate threat of conquest and enslavement by madmen to bring to the fore all the noble elements in the national character that we now associate with the war effort, and that if there had been no war we would have had in the 1940s a gridlocked society much like today's.

Could there now be a moral equivalent of World War II—a way of our getting a much-needed dose of all the war's positive effects on the country without actually going to war? O'Neill doesn't address this question directly, but it seems that he would tilt in the direction of the argument made in cartoon form by Dan Quayle last year: If the cultural elite would push the public in the direction of responsibility rather than self-gratification as the highest value, a lot of our social, political, and economic problems would begin to work themselves out. But this argument assumes that the tone of national life is created independently of economics and demographics. If we did in fact have better cultural values at the outset of World War II, surely part of the reason is that twelve years of Depression will go a long way toward stamping out self-indulgent individualism. Also, some of the features of American culture that alarm conservatives, such as rock and roll, recreational drug use, and high divorce rates, have been transmitted upward from the simple, virtuous, ordinary American people to the cultural elite, rather than vice versa.

It would be more satisfying to find an institutional way of knitting the country together than to hope, vaguely, for different values to take root. The main institutions at hand for the job are public schools (including universities), the military, and the national-service bureaucracy that is now aborning. Right now American society doesn't have a mechanism for bringing everyone together, which would give empathy and a sense of common purpose a chance to grow, and it doesn't provide a large part of the country with the feeling of true opportunity that is the wellspring of commitment to national (not interest-group) concerns. If everybody were guaranteed a decent education, and if school, the military, and national service became mass, shared experiences rather than subcultural ones, then we'd be much closer than we are now to the attractive side of the national culture during the war years. It was, after all, government action, not a spontaneous shift in attitudes, that brought out the best in the country back then. □

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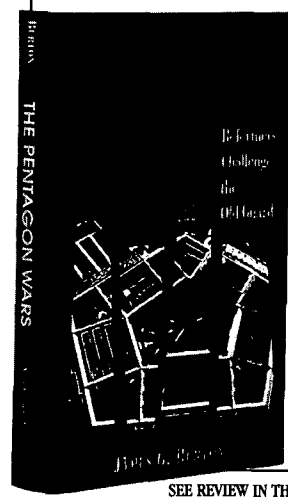
Reformers Challenge the Old Guard
By James G. Burton



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With Enemies Like These

The Pentagon reformers were the scourge of the military throughout the eighties, but guess whose weapons and tactics we used in Iraq?

by Gregg Easterbrook

The Pentagon Wars: Reformers Challenge the Old Guard
by James Burton, *Naval Institute Press, $23.95*

Once, contemplating the infantry strength of the old Warsaw Pact, an internal slogan of the Pentagon was "fight outnumbered and win." Throughout the 1980s, the military reform movement did exactly that to the Pentagon, defeating a superior well-armed force while armed solely with facts and ideas.

Looking back, the pace of change was spectacularly rapid. In 1979 James Fallows published, in *The Atlantic Monthly*, the first of his many articles concerning the existence within the Pentagon of the military reform movement, a loose association of uniformed and civilian officials convinced that weapons cost too much and did too little; equally important, that U.S. defense tactics and training methods were designed more from high-tech illusions and bureaucratic self-interest than awareness of what actually worked under field conditions. Military reform seemed like the ultimate lost cause, given the determination with which defense establishments resist new ideas, the array of well-connected interest groups that benefit from excessive Pentagon spending, and the distaste felt by the liberal establishment when people such as Fallows, and publications such as the *Atlantic*, advocated reforms that would make the American military stronger. More, the public coming-out of the military reform movement occurred just before Ronald Reagan came to office, expounding the notion that high military spending was in itself desirable. Military reformers were outnumbered, outgunned, outfinanced, and seemed certain to be outmaneuvered.

Instead, by 1985, just six years after defense reform went public, Defense Secretary Caspar Weinberger had cancelled the expensive and under-performing DIVAD automated antiaircraft gun, the first cancellation of a major weapon ready for production in the postwar era; the Army had torn up its field operations manual, replacing it with one based on the theories of maneuver warfare favored by reformers; a prominent reformer, Chuck Spinney, had been on the cover of *Time* magazine; and the entire old-line Pentagon establishment was in retreat before, at most, a few dozen poorly organized critics.

By 1990, just 11 years later, reform thinking had taken over many aspects of Pentagon life. Defense Secretary Richard Cheney would cancel the Navy's A-12 attack jet and demote its sponsors within the admiralty, publicly telling the Pentagon procurement hierarchy he was sick of being lied to about weapons costs. This was an amazing turn of events, considering that Weinberger spent much of the 1980s denying that this problem existed and previous Defense secretaries had happily averted their eyes from it. By 1990, the U.S. military would prepare for battle in the Gulf War using what was in no small part a reformer's script, wielding reformer weapons.

Many people, including a larger contingent of active-duty officers than might be guessed, played important roles in the military reform movement. Its central figures were John Boyd, Robert Dilger, Everest Riccioni and Charles Myers Jr., retired

Gregg Easterbrook, a contributing editor of Newsweek, The Atlantic Monthly, and The Washington Monthly, *is the author of the forthcoming book,* A Moment on the Earth.

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fighter pilots; Thomas Amlie, Thomas Christie, Ernest Fitzgerald, Pierre Sprey, and Spinney, civilian Pentagon analysts or consultants; former Senator Gary Hart and his aide William Lind; former congressman and former fighter pilot Denny Smith and his aide John Heubusch; former House Armed Services Committee staffer Anthony Battista; Fallows (conflict alert: an obvious *Monthly* favorite); Dina Rasor, who ran a small private foundation that publicized Pentagon abuses; and James Burton, a recently retired Army colonel.

Now Burton has written a book about his role in the movement. Both a kiss-and-tell (or maybe punch-and-tell) about Burton's confrontations with various defense big cheeses during the 1980s, and a critique of the military mindset, *The Pentagon Wars* goes far toward explaining how vast sums of money are wasted in the name of national defense and how large bureaucracies can engage in elaborate deceptions to avoid facing the truth about their own actions.

Burton was the colonel who almost single-handedly compelled the Army to conduct realistic live-fire testing of its M2 and M3 Bradley "fighting vehicles" (essentially, fancy personnel carriers). The tests showed the $1.7 million-per-copy Bradley much more vulnerable to antitank weapons than the Army's favored computer simulations had claimed. These tests ultimately led to sensible improvements, which surely helped keep some Bradleys struck by weapons in the Gulf War from lighting up, and in other cases kept fires and explosions under control long enough for crews to dismount. Burton quotes Maj. Gen. Peter McVey as saying, "During Desert Storm, more soldiers' lives were saved as a result of Bradley live-fire testing than we can count."

For his efforts Burton was hounded by the Army brass, which regularly attempted to transfer him to Alaska and other choice locations far from the Pentagon budget. At one point, Alton Keel, a Reagan appointee as undersecretary of the Air Force, had to threaten the Army that he would resign, in public, if Burton was not left on the job. Eventually Burton went public, first in congressional testimony and then on television. This guaranteed reform in the Bradley program, but was the end of Burton's active duty career.

The Pentagon Wars is surprisingly well-written for a first effort by a man used to drafting memos in military-speak: easy to follow, full of bright metaphors and lively insider anecdotes. At one point Burton notes that an Army statement to Congress grudgingly allowed, "'Bradley survivability can be improved.' The Army said this while attempting to prevent me from saying, 'Bradley casualties could be significantly reduced.' It claimed that my statement was classified." At another point, Burton recounts an episode in which Richard DeLauer, Weinberger's chief acquisition official, and well-known as an autocrat who never met a technical gizmo he did not like or a bill that seemed too high, agreed in 1983 to appear on "Good Morning America" with Rasor and Delaware Senator William Roth, sponsor of a bill requiring realistic testing. "During a commercial break," Burton writes, "DeLauer grabbed the senator by his coat lapels and shook him while he shouted at Roth, 'Stop listening to these reformers! Listen to me!'"

The DeLauer anecdote rings hollow. DeLauer actually grabbed a United States senator by his lapels and shook him? In a television studio, with cameras everywhere? Burton does not indicate his source for the account. Presumably he was not present, since Burton did not go public till 1986, three years later.

In numerous places in his book Burton offers anecdotes in which he or other reformers appear entirely sainted while the Pentagon old guard seems not just entrenched or addled, not just conniving, but actively EVIL. There's no indication of whether the depictions flow from Burton's recollection and thus have been filtered by his own biases; or can be verified by neutral witnesses; or whether Burton has conducted interviews.

There is little doubting that Burton was treated poorly by much of the defense establishment. But in *The Pentagon Wars* he spends too much time on his own travails and not enough on such subjects as the actual result of reform ideas. Here, he is much more compelling.

He writes, for example, of a perennial *Monthly* cause, the A-10 antitank aircraft. This plane, championed by Boyd, Sprey, and others, was from its birth despised by the Air Force because it is a low-cost, low-tech subsonic machine designed to support the Army. When the buildup for Desert Storm began, the Air Force planned to leave the A-10 home, partly from fear that it would show up the warp-speed fighters that cost 10 times as much. Norman Schwarzkopf insisted the Air Force's A-10 be brought, using the cross-service authority that came to him thanks to the 1986 leg-

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islation that reorganized the Joint Chiefs of Staff to reduce interservice rivalries, another reformer cause. According to Burton, though comprising just 15 percent of the combat aircraft in the Gulf, A-10 units accounted for more than 50 percent of the confirmed bomb damage.

The retired Army colonel David Hackworth has written in *Newsweek* that Iraqi troops feared the A-10 far more than the high-tech jets with the smart bombs, for while the latter would make a quick discrete hit on a small point then roar off, A-10s would make repeated passes, spraying large areas with heavy-caliber cannon fire. And unlike the thin-skinned high-tech jets that had no choice but to avoid zones of heavy enemy fire, A-10s attacked the thick of Iraqi defenses; plated with armor, they proved almost impossible to shoot down. Needless to say, practically on the day the Gulf conflict ended, the Air Force resumed its previous project of attempting to have the A-10 removed from active service, to be replaced by a thin-skinned supersonic superbomb aircraft costing several times as much.

Burton offers a substantial contribution to the understanding of the actual use of maneuver warfare with his section on Schwarzkopf's "left hook" tactic against Iraqi forces. Some of what Burton says is news and deserves wide attention.

When ground fighting began in Desert Storm, Marine and Army units attacked Kuwait and Saddam Hussein's southern flank, while two Army armored cavalry corps, commanded by Lt. Generals Gary Luck and Frederick Franks, staged the "left hook," racing first to the west and then east into Iraq. The plan was to reach Basra, north of the main assault line, encircling the Iraqi army and cutting off its retreat. The left hook units were specifically ordered to destroy Hussein's Republican Guard, his best troops, many of which were safe behind the line while forced conscripts served as fodder at the front.

The hook was highly likely to succeed, given the vast coalition advantage in air power, logistics, and intelligence; and the hundreds of billions of dollars U.S. taxpayers had invested in fast-moving M1 tanks, Bradleys, and helicopters that can shift the point attack with speed. Considering how much was spent, it would have been shocking if the left hook tactic had not worked.

Burton says: It didn't work.

Reformers have generally praised the left hook, saying it shows the military took to heart the notion of innovative, fast-changing maneuver warfare—rather than static or "attrition" combat—that is beloved by reformers and embodied in the Army doctrine manual with the zoomy name AirLand Battle. To Burton, the left hook shows that the Army has managed to stultify maneuver warfare, too.

According to Burton, the reason most of Saddam's Republican Guard managed to escape the Gulf War, and have since kept their despot in power, is that the left hook units failed to reach their objective of "closing the door" behind the Iraqi retreat, as Schwarzkopf said they would. Further, Burton asserts, some units failed, at best, to execute, and perhaps defied Schwarzkopf's order to engage and destroy as much of the Republican Guard as possible before the cease-fire took effect.

Here, Burton says, is what happened. First, the jet-turbined-powered M1 tanks that made up the bulk of the left hook elements consume seven gallons of fuel per mile—not seven miles to the gallon, but seven gallons per mile—far more than any other tank in the world. Almost from the outset of the left hook, M1 tanks began outrunning their fuel supplies. Burton says that Franks, worried about being caught exposed, slowed his armor down to a net advance of less than what might have been achieved by diesel-powered tanks that have lower top speeds but don't halt as often to refuel.

Equally important, one of the planks of AirLand Battle, a plank fought by the most important military reformer, the retired colonel John Boyd, calls for forces to "synchronize." Boyd has long asserted that synchronization is for watches, not people; under the stress of war things happen so differently from what was expected that plans should be forgotten and targets of the moment pursued. But, Burton writes, the left hook units wasted many hours sitting around waiting for one another to catch up, so that the advance could be synchronized. When the cease-fire came, there were tanks in an onion field west of Basra, less than an hour from cutting off the Republican Guard; the tanks had been waiting several hours to get synchronized. Thus did maneuver warfare, intended as a free-form antibureaucratic strategy that would make best use of the American edge in fast-moving equipment, intelligence, and personal initiative, begin to acquire the weight of a new orthodoxy.

Plane speaking

Important as military reformers have been, Burton errs by exaggerating their significance. To hear him tell it, for example, Boyd, Sprey, and Spinney were single-handedly responsible for the development of the successful and relatively low-cost A-10, F-16, and F/A-18 aircraft. These men played important roles and, to a surprising and welcome degree, bent the Pentagon old guards to their wills, but it is ridiculous to think these projects could have succeeded if they did not have many, many sympathizers on the Pentagon's E Ring, on Capitol Hill, and in the field.

Burton further errs by declining to acknowledge the failings of the reform movement. He might have mentioned that Robert Dilger ended his career in mild disrepute when a homemade antitank weapon he was attempting to sell to the Pentagon discharged in the back of

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Dilger's pickup truck at an Arlington, Virginia, gasoline station, setting a gas pump ablaze and injuring three people.

Reformers, especially Rasor, mercilessly ridiculed the M1 tank, calling it a turkey or saying its complex gizmos would prove so unreliable in combat that the older, cheaper Russian-built T72 would emerge superior. Fuel consumption aside, the M1 performed almost flawlessly in the Gulf. There were no notable breakdown problems, despite the desert sand and heat. In most confrontations between M1s and T72s operated by Iraqis, the M1s scored first- or second-shot kills well before the T72s were close enough to commence fire. None of this is mentioned in *The Pentagon Wars*. Since the reform movement has been right about so many things, it's no shame to have been wrong about a few things. But given how vehemently reformers savaged the Pentagon for refusing to face the faults of its dogma, it's unfortunate to see a reformer do the same.

Burton portrays the reform movement as composed entirely of miserable outcasts. In fact, one reason reformers accomplished so much was access. Boyd has personally spent hours briefing (tutoring would be the better word) most recent members of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, many of their senior officers, and several recent top civilian defense officials, up to Secretary Cheney. Sprey, Spinney, and others have been able to develop powerful critiques of military spending and performance because they not only have Pentagon or near-Pentagon employment but also access to privileged military information. Nearly all the reformers have had many allies in Congress and in the media. When Spinney got into trouble, *Time* went to bat for him. When Burton got into trouble, an undersecretary went to bat for him.

Melodrama may make the reformer's story a better read, but when Burton lets his feelings slip into self-pity, his credibility suffers, especially considering that Burton himself could sometimes be a tad hard to take, exhibiting the kind of zeal and belief in his own chosen status often observed in whistle-blowers. When in 1987 *The Washington Post*'s Outlook section ran an article "by the establishment defender Fred Reed" savaging military reformers, Burton was aghast that "attempts to get the congressional Military Reform Caucus to react and come to [our] defense were useless. The leaders had abandoned their troops under fire. Those of us who were hard-core reformers realized the movement was dead." Apparently Burton had come to expect that every setback, even an unfavorable article, would lead to a storm of congressional and media counter-responses.

(Reed's article was memorably out of touch, lambasting reformers in drawn-out fashion for what Reed claimed was a childish mistake about science in asserting that the aluminum in Bradley armor can burn. Aluminum is a metal, Reed argued, and thus is not combustible. In fact, many metals burn: Uranium burns hideously well. The propellent in the space shuttle's solid-rocket boosters is a powdered form of aluminum. There, Colonel Burton, you are avenged.)

The Pentagon is still expensive and cumbersome, and procurement outrages continue, as the Air Force's difficulties in trying to build the C-17, not all that different from a commercial jet, attest. Yet the Pentagon has gone through many changes since the reform movement went public in 1979: an almost admirable number of changes, given the military's resistance to reform. Budgets are declining; bases are being closed; admirals are fired for lying about costs; unreliable weapons such as the M1 have been made reliable; relatively affordable weapons like the F-16 and F/A-18 continue to dominate the procurement budget; the Joint Chiefs now have real responsibility; blacks and women are ascending to the senior ranks; nuclear weapons are being dismantled; maneuver warfare, however flawed, is official policy; recent performance in the Gulf and Somalia was not only efficient but, more importantly, moral. Not bad at all for the creaking old Pentagon to have come so far in just 14 years. Reformers have much to be proud of.

Yet Burton exits the stage embittered. He tells us Sprey has given up and now records music for a living; "John Boyd is retired to Florida, Dina Rasor moved to California to raise a family, Bob Dilger is farming in Ohio, Tom Amlie retired. . . I retired to a small, rural county in Virginia." To Burton, the reformers left town defeated, the Pentagon remaining wholly EVIL. His book concludes, "the whole [military] business stinks, regardless of the service involved. The sad truth is that no one really gives a damn."

This is not, in fact, the truth. Many people did care; many aided the reformers in their efforts and thanked them broadly for the results. And no reformers were personally harmed by the experience. Burton, Rasor, and Spinney became media celebrities for a spell, which has its downside but is hardly imprisonment at the Gulag. True, none of the reformers has gone onto wide glory or a chest full of metals. But anyone who takes on a big institution from the inside knows, or ought to know, that a personal price will be paid—that's what makes such people heroes.

It may well be that sometime soon, while people such as Boyd are still alive, Pentagon internal revisionism will advance to the point where some of the reformers are called to the E Ring or White House and given the formal recognition of service, including the medals, that they have earned. I hope that happens. But if it does not, the reformers should know that saving the lives of soldiers and making the country stronger are thanks enough in themselves. The medals and the ceremonies are a lesser coin of compensation. □

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Mistaken Identity

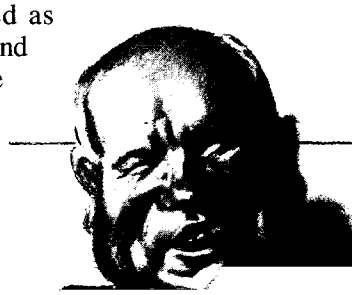
One of Jim Garrison's former staffers explains how Oliver Stone picked the wrong villain—and the wrong hero—in the JFK assasination

by Tom Bethell

Case Closed
Gerald Posner, *Random House, $25*

The television networks have been gearing up for 30th anniversary specials, and according to Mary Ferrell, a retired legal secretary in Dallas who just may be the world's best informed person on the Kennedy assassination, the new consensus is that the Warren Commission was right: Lee Harvey Oswald alone shot the president, and was himself shot for the reasons that Jack Ruby gave in 1963. And so we return, after a 30-year hegira, to the starting point.

As the title bluntly tells us, Gerald Posner's book, *Case Closed*, is very much in line with this consensus. He totally demolishes the acoustical evidence on which a House Select Committee (irresponsibly) decided 15 years ago that a fourth shot had been fired at Kennedy. His goal, Posner writes, was to "reexamine all the evidence on the JFK assassination." Quite a task, as there are a million pages of government documents and over 2,000 books to go through. Lots more books will be coming out this fall. Mary Ferrell tells me that in one of them her husband, Buck, is identified as having been stationed behind the picket fence on the Grassy Knoll, a 30-06 rifle in his hands; and she herself emerges as the famous but mysterious Babushka Lady, who appears in many photographs standing close to the presidential limousine, apparently filming the proceedings. (The woman has never been identified, but was certainly not Mary Ferrell.)



As it happened, I worked for the late New Orleans

Tom Bethell, a contributing editor of The Washington Monthly, *is Washington editor of* The American Spectator.

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District Attorney, Jim Garrison, on his weird investigation of the assassination, later the basis of a mostly fictitious movie by Oliver Stone. Naturally I turned first to Posner's chapter on Garrison and found it to be a diligent and reliable summary. Contrary to what Jim Garrison (and Oliver Stone) wanted to believe, there was no basis at all for the charges against Clay Shaw, a New Orleans businessman, and several others who happened to cross Garrison's path. The entire investigation was a complete waste of everybody's time; far worse than that for Shaw, of course, whose lifetime savings were consumed by lawyers and whose reputation may have been irreparably damaged, despite his speedy acquittal by a New Orleans jury.

Garrison's investigation was based on Oswald's presence in New Orleans in the summer of 1963. Three years later, in the fall of 1966, a private investigator told Garrison that a rival private investigator and former airline pilot named David Ferrie had been involved somehow with Oswald. On the day of the assassination Ferrie had traveled with two companions to Houston (a supposedly suspicious journey). This was what set Garrison off on his erratic search, but the great defect of his investigation was that he never was able to establish the most basic point, that Ferrie and Oswald in fact did know one another. (The initial tipster was totally unreliable.) Nonetheless, Garrison enjoyed the idea of solving this famous mystery and so he pursued the matter. Then, in February 1967, one of the New

Jay Lincoln

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Orleans newspapers published an account of his investigation, including information about his prime suspect, Ferrie.

News media from all over the world descended on New Orleans, and Garrison was happily giving interviews 'round the clock. Then an extraordinary thing happened. Ferrie unexpectedly died of a brain aneurysm. Garrison's staff, who were not all as crazy as he was, rightly regarded this as an incredible stroke of luck for the boss. The media were in town. The boss had gathered his headlines (but had no case, as the staff uncomfortably realized). Then Ferrie dropped dead on us. Perfect! Here was a golden opportunity for Garrison to quit while he was ahead: declare sadly that he had tried to find the truth about who had killed our president, but that his suspect had mysteriously died. Fold the investigation (going nowhere anyway), clam up tight, play hard to get, and then bask in the attention that would inevitably continue for some time.

But that's not what Garrison did. Showing just how out of touch with reality he really was, he immediately arrested Clay Shaw and charged him with conspiring to assassinate the president. The crime of the century, right? The immediate reaction in the DA's office was: "Oh no! Can't believe he did that! Now what? Who's this Shaw, anyway? What does he have to do with the story?" And so on. Garrison had not only blown his opportunity to extricate himself from the jam he was in, but had put himself in a far worse jam. Shaw would have to be brought to trial sooner or later, and trials, when we last checked, were public proceedings in the United States.

Later on I talked to Jim Alcock, the chief trial attorney, about the approaching Shaw trial. He was thinking about the coming embarrassment—the sorry parade of perjured or browbeaten or downright nutty witnesses. All of it in front of the national news media. Horrible! "We're looking at a directed verdict," he said with a worried look. (In such a case, the judge acquits the defendant on the basis of the prosecution's case, without even waiting for the defense.) The feeling in Garrison's office was that one more mysterious death would suit us just fine. In fact, why didn't the CIA or the KGB, or whoever it was, hurry up and get it over with? What was taking them so long? But Shaw kept right on breathing, and the trial kept approaching.

If you can visualize that scene you are much closer to the truth than was depicted in the Oliver Stone movie, with Kevin Costner playing Garrison as an earnest seeker-after-truth, staying up nights puzzling diligently over discrepancies, saving the country *and* trying to spend quality time with the kids. What rot. Garrison was drinking Old Fashioneds in the New Orleans Athletic Club. To give him his due, he was actually quite a bit more interesting than the Costner-bore. Above all, though, he was irresponsible to a degree that most people would find hard to believe. Would a D.A. really abuse his authority so recklessly? Would, and did.

Posner is to be commended for having sorted through all this material very efficiently and finding it to be 100 percent chaff. He tells the story smoothly in a 30-page chapter, including new details that I was not aware of.

What about the role of Lee Harvey Oswald? I hope I don't disappoint assassination theorists too much when I say that the evidence is overwhelming that Oswald really did shoot Kennedy. This is what Posner finds, and I have to agree with him. But you can see why there has been a prolonged hue and cry about the truth. Shots rang out in a public square, the president was killed, no one got a clear view of the assassin, a suspect was arrested in a movie theater a couple of miles away. A cop had been shot. Two days later the suspect himself was gunned down on TV by a man well known to the Dallas police. The suspect had not admitted his guilt. In fact, he said he was "the patsy."

Turns out he had defected to the Soviet Union, before that had served in the Marines and worked on a U2 base. The spy plane was shot down while he was in Russia, but no, the KGB wasn't interested in him, and in corroboration a KGB agent conveniently defected and came to Washington to tell us exactly that right after the assassination. Hmmmm. And no, the CIA wasn't interested when he did come back after three years' absence, with a Russian wife. Well yes, he did have the name of an FBI agent in his address book, and he had worked in this high-tech photography place; had the word "microdot" written down somewhere; had gone to the Soviet and Cuban embassies in Mexico City in September 1963, where there had been this mix-up with the CIA photographs taken as he entered one or other of the buildings; and yes, it was true that our lone assassin had hung around with this peripatetic oil-geologist fellow, George de Mohrenschildt by name.

Conspiracy of dunces

Anyway you look at it, it's an odd story, and Posner had his work cut out for him. In case you are tempted to get interested (which on the whole I

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do not recommend) the easiest part to eliminate right off is the Jack Ruby business. There's no doubt that in shooting Oswald he was not part of any conspiracy. Even some of the more tenacious conspiracy buffs concede that. On his death bed Ruby was interviewed by his brother, in Yiddish, the guards not understanding what was being said; no point in concealing anything at that stage. Jack repeated that he thought he was doing us all a favor.

As for Oswald: He owned the rifle found in the book depository, he carried a package of "curtain rods" to work that day, and he had shot at General Edwin Walker six months earlier. An unreasonable level of doubt is required to sustain the belief that he didn't do the shooting. It's harder to say that he acted alone, of course, but the motorcade route was only announced three days ahead of time, and Oswald's movements and contacts in that period were carefully examined. If one day the full truth were to be revealed by the voice of God, I would bet a large sum that Oswald had no accomplice.

It's when we turn to the possible links to intelligence agencies that things get murky. Posner accepts as truthful the account of Yuri Nosenko, the defector who told the CIA that the KGB had no interest in Oswald, and he is probably right about that, too. It is highly implausible that the KGB had any interest in assassinating the president. It's possible, of course, that any contact they may have had with Oswald was posthumously played down in order to avoid guilt by association with the events in Dallas. In short: "We knew the guy, but we had no idea he was going to do *that*!"

The FBI's involvement with Oswald shortly before the assassination is worth a closer look. Following Oswald's pro-Castro leafletting activities in New Orleans and his visit to the Soviet Embassy in Mexico City, FBI Dallas field agent James Hosty twice interviewed Marina Oswald and her friend Ruth Paine. Then, ten days before the assassination, Oswald walked into the Dallas FBI office and left a note for Hosty. According to Hosty, the note told him to "come talk to me directly," and to "cease bothering my wife." No one is sure, however, because after the assassination, the special agent in charge, J. Gordon Shanklin, ordered the note destroyed (a point that did not come out until 1975). This was "one of the Bureau's worst breaches of trust in the case," Posner says. "It allowed skeptics to question the FBI's overall role and relationship to [Oswald]."

Bill Alexander, the assistant D.A. in Dallas who drew up the murder indictments against Oswald, offered this explanation to Posner: "What they were doing with the Hosty situation is covering their asses. By Sunday, when Oswald was killed, [J. Edgar] Hoover was already convinced that Oswald was guilty. People like Shanklin were running for cover to make sure no one could point a finger and say, 'You failed to spot Oswald as a threat.' They were afraid the note would be seen as something they were derelict in following up on. And Oswald was dead, so they figured, 'What the hell, we don't need it any more,' and they destroyed it. It was a pretty stupid thing to do."

That sounds plausible to me, although you can see why suspicions have remained at a high level.

A minor complaint I have is that Warren Commission counsel David Belin made many of the same points in two books and might have been given a little more credit. My only other quarrel is that Posner at times seems rather too determined to mow down all doubts. It is in the nature of events as complex and detailed as those under review that their historical reconstruction is bound to leave loose ends and dangling participants. In the end, admitting uncertainty here and there may be the best way of establishing one's bona fides as a truth-seeker. Posner's brusque dispatch of all doubts—Case Closed!—is bound to provoke resistance from the usual suspects and a softer line here and there might have been more persuasive. On the whole, though, he has done a tremendous job, and I for one will not be sorry if the level of interest in this tragedy dissipates as a result. □

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POLITICAL BOOKNOTES

The Arabists: The Romance of an American Elite
Robert D. Kaplan
The Free Press, $24.95

By Charles William Maynes

Because most Americans are the descendants of immigrants who chose to move to the United States, this country has always been somewhat suspicious of citizens who make the opposite decision to live abroad. Our diplomats are especially suspect. Robert Kaplan is therefore working with combustible material in his book, the story of the handful of Americans who over the past 200 years have chosen to learn Arabic and live in Araby.

Their fascinating history provided Kaplan with the material for an August 1992 cover article in the *Atlantic*, which has now been expanded into a book. The best pages in this study concern the story of early Christian missionaries who suffered incredible hardships to bring hospitals and colleges to the Middle East but few converts to Christ. Their subsequent contribution was that a number of their children, raised in the Arab world, entered the diplomatic service.

Some of this same missionary spirit survived even in the careers of those who were not descended from missionaries. Thus Kaplan describes the heroic efforts of the American Embassy in Khartoum in the mid-1980s to rescue thousands of Ethiopian Jews. According to Kaplan, the untold story of Operation Moses was the decisive role of American diplomats, who took great personal risks to carry this off. Ordered to maintain silence afterwards, they never claimed credit, while, as Kaplan notes, Israeli and Jewish-American sources rushed into print to highlight Israel's contribution, which was much less significant.

These and other human interest stories are the best part of Kaplan's book. But there is a more troubling subplot to Kaplan's study concerning U.S. policy toward the Middle East. According to Kaplan, the Arabists in the State Department collectively have inflicted great damage on the American people and government. Over the years they have maintained an unreasoning hostility to Israel, although he is careful to state that most are not anti-Semitic; they have virtually created Arab Sunni nationalism through their work in Arab higher education; they have excused outrageous Arab excesses in their zeal for better diplomatic relations between the United States and the Arab world; and, in the case of Iraq, they may actually have led their country into an unnecessary war.

Are these charges convincing?

Kaplan is certainly right that the Arabists have been more critical of Israel than most other American officials. And a failing of this group of diplomatic specialists has been that until recently, few of them lived or studied in Israel. These points have aroused even more concern than they otherwise might have because a few key State Department and other federal officials played a shameful role in World War II in dealing with knowledge of the holocaust. The actions of these non-Arabists have tended to taint the outside assessment of the postwar Arabists in the State Department.

In attacking their attitude toward Israel, however, Kaplan fails to note that Israeli scholarship has finally acknowledged a point that the Arabists have long asserted, namely that the bulk of Palestinians did not leave their land "voluntarily" in 1948 but were pressured or forced to leave and that the problem of the Middle East cannot be solved until the rights of the Palestinians are taken into account. (None of the prominent Israeli historians who have documented this—Benny Morris, Simha Flapan, Avi Shlaim, Tom Segev, or Illan Pappe—are found in Kaplan's bibliography.) The Arabists, came into daily contact with Palestinians who settled in other Arab countries and tried over the years to advance this view, but it was long rejected. Golda Meir, when Prime Minister of Israel, once famously pronounced that the Palestinians were not a people. The U.S. government refused until Camp David to acknowledge that the Palestinians had any rights at all. Even then, the formulation was extremely cautious—legitimate "interests," which others (including Israel) were to determine, not legitimate "rights," which others are to guarantee.

Recent changes on the Israeli political scene now date Kaplan's concerns, which reflect the right wing of Israeli politics—in power when he wrote his study but out of power now. For example, Kaplan denounces some Arabists for calling for talks with the PLO and is critical of their interest in Syria. But recently, Israel ended the ban on contact with the PLO, Shimon Peres met face-to-face with PLO leaders, and mutual recognition seems imminent. There is a growing recognition that the alternative to a settlement with the PLO is an unending conflict with religious fundamentalists among the Palestinian population. Israel sees Syria as a key component to progress in the peace process. These are all views with which the Arabists would be very comfortable.

The main difficulty with Kaplan's account, however, is that it attributes

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an importance to the Arabists that they never had. Like the China hands, many of whom also had missionary parents, the Arabists have tended to look for ways to improve U.S. ties with countries to which they are accredited, and to this end, they may have downplayed some of the more unattractive features of Arab political life. But the source of American policy nevertheless has remained in Washington, and the lodestar has been a combination of domestic politics and geopolitics, not human rights. This recently became clear when Washington sent a senior official to Yemen to warn the government there that its recent, relatively free election was no model for neighboring states, i.e., oil-rich and pro-American but undemocratic Saudi Arabia. For most of the period since 1948, Israel has benefited from being able to contend that it was an ally of the United States in the common effort to reduce Soviet influence in the oil-rich Middle East.

Kaplan's strongest case for the view that embassies, not Washington, set policy occurs during the section on the Gulf War. Kaplan describes April Glaspie, ambassador to Iraq, as a person who "drove" U.S. policy in the area prior to the war's outbreak.

Now, Ambassador Glaspie certainly did not distinguish herself in her fateful last minute interview with Saddam Hussein prior to the invasion of Kuwait. Perhaps had she done something professional ambassadors rarely do—depart from their instructions—and had decided on her own authority to warn Saddam Hussein that the U.S. would respond militarily, the Iraqis might have hesitated and the war could have been averted.

But as a general rule ambassadors do not drive policy. They execute it. Their role is primarily that of messenger and observer. The idea that a young ambassador who never met the leader of Iraq until her famous interview could "drive" U.S. policy towards Iraq is unlikely on its face and contradicted by Kaplan's own text. According to his own account, when Under Secretary for Political Affairs Robert Kimmet and Policy Planning Director Dennis Ross attempted in April 1990 to put the U.S.-Iraq relationship "on ice," they encountered opposition from National Security Adviser Brent Scowcroft. Supporting the Iraq policy was Richard Haass, a strong supporter of close ties between the United States and Israel and the NSC staff member responsible for the Middle East—in other words, no Arabist.

The first female ambassador in the Middle East in American history was not going to challenge the conventional wisdom when such powerful and politically connected figures supported it. She was going to make her mark by showing them how well she could carry out instructions. Her performance during that critical hour had more the character of a follower than a leader. It is worth noting that Haass, who says he was never approached by Kaplan for an interview, regards the idea that Glaspie "drove" U.S. policy as "absurd." Haass contends that although key figures in the Bush administration were disturbed by some of Iraq's actions and therefore decided to reduce agricultural credits to Iraq prior to the war, overall there was a consensus in policy toward Iraq until the fateful invasion. He does not know of the policy shift Kaplan says he helped to turn down. Nor, for that matter, does Scowcroft.

In making his case against Glaspie, moreover, Kaplan never mentions that in the few days remaining before the invasion, Washington passed up the opportunity to correct Glaspie's presentation. In brief, Kaplan detracts from an otherwise interesting book with his attempt to blame a few area specialists for a failure in U.S. policy that was approved at the highest levels and that reflected the geopolitical view of senior officials in charge of U.S. policy at the time.

Indeed, the real charge against U.S. diplomatic officials in the Middle East is not so much that they are hermetically sealed inside the Arab culture and language but rather that they are locked inside the American bureaucracy. Secluded in their security-obsessed embassies, deprived of adequate travel funds, terrified of criticism (particularly from Congress, which passes on ambassadorial appointments), incestuously commenting on cables from Washington or neighboring posts, left with little time to read much else, too many of them lead a closed existence that makes living in Omaha seem like a cosmopolitan experience.

To break out of this pattern, it will not be enough to recruit ethnics instead of WASPS, as Kaplan urges, or to encourage assignments in Israel, which are already taking place. Rather it will be necessary to resist the polarization and character assassination that are so often part of policy discussions concerning the Middle East. Area specialists will have to know that they will be rewarded when they tell Washington what is going on rather than parroting what Washington wants to hear. □

Charles William Maynes is editor of Foreign Policy. *He served as a Foreign Service officer in Laos and the Soviet Union.*

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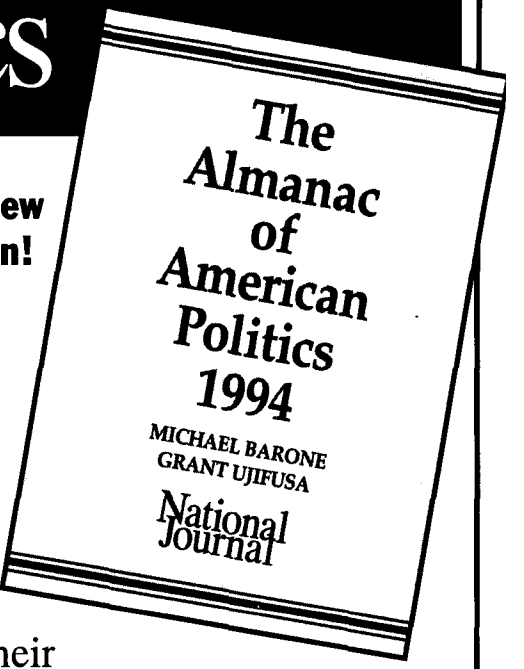

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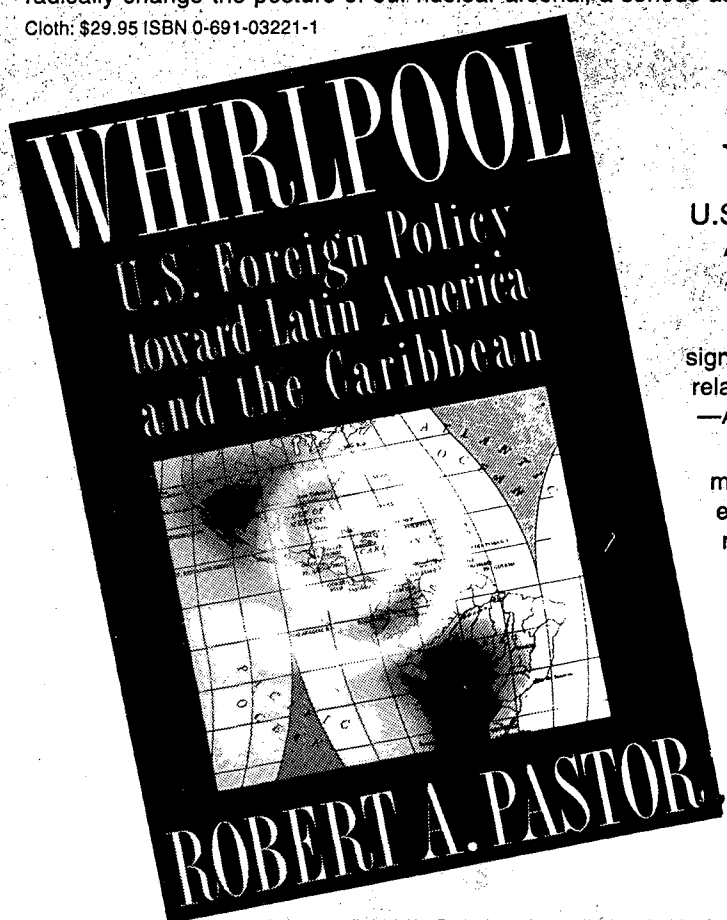

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